THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES
IN THE QUEST FOR PEACE

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Abstract

Universities should and can play the role of teaching and theorising peace, and the role of peace advocacy as well as peace building in the world, including in our region. Universities are in a position to do so because they are a 'marketplace' for the fermentation of diverse and even conflicting views and ideas; and with such a culture of "agreeing to disagree" as well as respect for each other, universities strive to achieve excellence within the framework of managing difference and maintaining peaceful and cordial relations. This kind of culture should continue to be strengthened not only in universities, but also promoted in society and in the world at large, so that it forms the cornerstone for conflict resolution and peace building. However, universities can contribute towards the quest for peace when -- and only when -- the university leadership and the powers-that-be are committed to these ideals, especially that of respect for difference, and managing it in a peaceful and civilized manner within and outside the institutional framework of the university. At the same time, scholars -- as a thinking and speech community -- should articulate their demand and support for such a role to be acted out by universities, and throw their intellectual and moral weight behind the global movement for a culture of peace. They also should take a principled position with regard to peace and conflict resolution at the global, regional, national and local levels without fear or favour. Universities have the moral high ground and authority to do so.

Acknowledgements

Bio-data of the Author

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THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN THE QUEST FOR PEACE

Mr. Chairman, the President of ASAIHL and Members of the ASAIHL Board, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen!

First of all, I would like to express my deep appreciation and thanks to the ASAIHL Board for inviting me to deliver the ASAIHL "Lecture of the Year". This is indeed a great honour for me to stand at this rostrum speaking to such a distinguished audience. While there are a number of other crucial themes involving the world particularly the Southeast Asian nations, the question of peace is undoubtedly one of the most important, given the tumultuous developments we have been witnessing across the globe and in our region. It is thus fitting and timely that ASAIHL chooses the question of peace and the role of universities to be the over-arching theme for deliberation.

In this regard, allow me to share some of my humble thoughts on this important topic of our time, "The Role of Universities in the Quest for Peace". I shall proceed by first providing a brief scenario of the historical and contemporary concerns about the question of war and peace, before going into the role of the university and the challenges it faces in the quest for peace.

Question of War and Peace

Throughout history, there has been a 'double' movement, one tending towards peace and harmony, while the other towards war and violence. While during ancient and medieval times, many wars had been waged, these wars had assumed new dimensions and scale in modern times after the emergence of nation-states and the rivalries between the major powers. The question of war and peace has become a central concern for the modern world especially since the beginning of the 20th century, more so after the formation of the League of Nations, and subsequently the United Nations.

Such concern has not been unfounded – for, the 20th century, has been the most violence-ridden century in the recorded history of mankind. Two world wars were fought with such tenacity and colossal loss of lives and property, not to mention the eruption of many regional and civil wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions, as well as CIA-engineered coups and counter-coups, and so on. Humanity suffered due to a culture of war, violence and hatred, and peace remained as elusive as ever.

However, with the ending of the Cold War in the last decade of the previous century, there were high expectations for a better and more peaceful future. Indeed, with such hopes in view, the United Nations declared the millennium year, 2000, as "The International Year for A Culture of Peace", the year 2001 as the Year for Inter-civilisational Dialogue, while the first decade of the 21st century has been dedicated by the UN for the promotion of "The Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World".

Yet, these hopes were dashed no sooner than we stepped into the first few years of the 21st century, as wars and violence -- the causes of which were mainly rooted in the injustices and unresolved conflicts of the previous century – continue to haunt our lives. The rise of the neo-conservatives in the United States since the 1990s, with their "Project for the New American Century", and their victory in controlling the White House and the military-industrial complex, signals the sharp swing to the right in the most powerful nation on earth. On the other hand, the most important unresolved case of the last century – the Palestinian question – remains unresolved, as the US-backed Israeli Zionists – flouting with impunity a series of the UN Security Council resolutions -- continue with their intransigence in Palestine, massacring children, women and the elderly, thus depriving Palestinians of their just right to an independent sovereign state.

On another level, market-driven globalisation, with the US Treasury-Wall Street-IMF complex as its main driver, has since the 1980s become almost like a juggernaut, destabilizing societies and states, creating winners and losers, with the big and powerful nations being winners and captors, while the small and the weak, losers and captives.

Inequality between rich and poor nations has widened; so also the inequality within nations between the rich on one hand, and the poor and vulnerable groups on the other.

All these developments have added fuel to the accumulated frustration, despair and deep-seated anger against injustices, inequalities and double standards as perceived by a sizeable segment of the world's population, namely among members of the Muslim *ummah*. These have fanned militancy and extremism, the climax being the September 11 attack on the World Trade Center in New York, in 2001, the responsibility for which is now being openly claimed by Osama ben Laden and his Al Qaeda operatives. In the name of peace and freedom, the so-called global "war against terror" has been waged, and the US has been on a war footing. Hence, the invasion of Afghanistan in November 2001, and the invasion of Iraq one and a half years later. However, the "weapon of mass destruction" (WMD) theory, peddled by President George W. Bush to justify the Iraq war, turned out to be the "weapon of mass deception", and "the mother of all lies". Violence continues unabated and peace still remains a mirage.

The September 11 attack signals a new phenomenon – the entry of the non-state actor into the power equation on security and peace, challenging the sole superpower. The US "war against terror" on the other hand, also signals something new -- the implementation of a new doctrine, that of global comprehensive strategic security, involving pre-emptive strikes against any perceived threat to the US interest anywhere on this planet. With these developments, state sovereignty is at great risk, multilateralism has been sidelined by unilateralism, while violence and terrorism (both state and non-state) have become deterritorialised.

These developments also spread to our region, placing it in an intensely difficult situation. Southeast Asia – known as a region where monsoons meet – had been a meeting point of major world civilizations throughout history. Prior to the coming of western colonialism some 500 years ago, the various trading ports, namely Melaka in the Malay Peninsula (now known as Peninsular Malaysia), had seen the blossoming of pluralist

tolerance and cosmopolitanism (Wang 2001). But, during the 20th century and today, we Southeast Asians too have suffered the ravages of foreign invasion, war, extremism, subversion, and violence. August 2005 shall mark the sixtieth anniversary of the ending of the Pacific War (1941-1945) that engulfed our region more than six decades ago. In my country, Malaysia, with the ignominious defeat and surrender of 100,000 British and allied troops to the Japanese in February 1942, the whole country including Singapore, fell under the jackboots of the Japanese fascists. Historians record that the Japanese occupation in Malaya led to the killing of 70,000 inhabitants, with 80,000 more perishing due to torture and imprisonment, and another 300,000 due to malnutrition and forced labour. In Vietnam, hundreds of thousands of lives had also been lost especially during the struggle against American invasion.

While we may have put the Pacific War and the Vietnam War behind us, the Bali and Jakarta bombings are still fresh in our minds. So also are the fighting in southern Philippines, and the on-going violence and counter-violence in southern Thailand.

Indeed, we are locked in a bitter struggle over memory – memory of war and violence, with the fervent hope not to see anymore of it. This memory cannot be erased as war and violence continue to engulf our lives. The key question that confronts us then is: Can we translate our memory of war, and the culture of war and violence into a driving force to promote a culture of peace, tolerance and pluralist acceptance of the other as envisaged in the UN Charter? Can universities the world over – our region included – carry this mission to its successful conclusion? To me, this is a very tall order given the fact that we are living in a world full of contradictions and injustices, and of double standards. But try and struggle we must, and we shall strive to overcome. We cannot be defeatist or pessimist.

Concept of Peace

This brings me to the second set of questions: How should we understand peace? And in what way can universities play the role in promoting peace?

In the conventional sense, peace is often taken to mean the absence of war. However, such absence of war and violence is only a prerequisite for building and strengthening peace, not its substitute. We have to conceptualise peace, at least, on two levels. Conceptualising peace in the 'negative' sense -- i.e., the absence of war -- belongs to the first level that deals with only one aspect of the issue. Unfortunately, a great tragedy of our time is that peace has been seen in this way by most states, especially the world's big powers. The consequence of such a jaundiced view is that in the name of maintaining peace and preserving order, massive amounts of scarce resources have been siphoned off to the military and police, to intelligence gathering and espionage, to military research and to the arms race. Yet, the greater their military might, the more they double talk about maintaining peace, and accusing others – often victims of violence and aggression – as being a threat to peace.

However, if we look around us, we also have situations in various countries in which there is no war, but neither is there real peace or harmony. Prejudice, mistrust, misunderstanding, ignorance, ancient hatred as well as tension exist between people, often of different ethnic groups, religious groups, classes, tribes, regions, gender and so on. Religious bigotry, ethnic and national chauvinism, injustices of various sorts, arrogance of power and status, and so on have existed since ancient times, and are still pervasive today in many societies. Such societies are fraught with flashpoints, with potentials for the eruption of violence -- and even war -- if appropriate and effective conflict resolution mechanisms are not put in place. Hence it is necessary to look at peace beyond merely the absence of the conflagration of war.

This brings us to the second level conceptualisation which examines peace more holistically. From this perspective, peace is understood not only as the absence of war and fighting, but as something far deeper and broader, requiring an intrinsically humane discourse which underscores the well-being of humanity. To me, peace is essentially an expression of the harmonious relationship between fellow humans with themselves -- as individuals, groups, communities, nations, and states -- as well as with the environment. Peace is both abstract and concrete. From the social and political angle, peace is freedom from disturbance and injustice, expressed concretely in the form of the sustained existence of harmony, respect and acceptance of others as equal human beings irrespective of their colour, creed, gender, tribe, region, and so on. At state-to-state level, peace is the sustained practice of respect for the sovereignty of other states, and the practice of dealing with each other – big and small -- as equals in the community of nations.

Peace is also cultural, thus we can talk about the culture of peace, involving world views, belief systems, mind sets, habits, and practices of people at the everyday level that help cultivate and, in practice, preserve justice, freedom, harmony, respect, understanding, and pluralist acceptance of others, as well as respect and care for the environment. As Ambassador Chowdhury (2001), Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations on A Global Movement for a Culture of Peace, aptly puts it, "(the) culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes and ways of life based on principle of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, and respect for diversity, dialogue and understanding which will bring about the transformation from a culture of war to a culture of peace".

Thus, to sum up, I would say that peace is not only the ideology, condition and process of upholding justice and freedom, but also of living with, and accepting difference. To put it in another way, peace is the celebration of justice, difference and diversity, including the appreciation and sharing of the bounties of nature with fellow human beings.

Both the conventional and the holistic conceptualisations of peace articulated above together serve as the framework that we can use to discuss the role of universities in the quest for peace.

Character of the University and Higher Education

It is generally accepted that universities have their traditional roles and functions of teaching, research, publication, and services. The university strives to disseminate knowledge as well as make new discoveries. It upholds and inculcates a certain culture and ethos that cherishes the freedom of inquiry and expression. The university traditionally stands as a symbol championing the highest of human virtues and ideals, as a citadel of truth, an epitome of the courage of conviction, as well as an institution that nurtures and promotes the culture of peace and pluralist tolerance and acceptance.

In 1923, not long after the First World War, the German philosopher, Karl Jaspers published his book, *The Idea of the University*, which was revised and published again in 1946, a year after the end of the Second World War. Jaspers saw the university as playing a role in the reconstruction of a more humane society, but based on a more unitary and purposeful conception of knowledge. He saw the modern university as having four main functions: research, teaching, a professional education, and the transmission of a particular kind of culture (Barnett 1990: 21). But both the world wars had threatened the values represented by the university, though the university subsequently tried to reclaim and strengthen them.

Today, besides the continuing wars and violence that threaten the values of the university that Jaspers was concerned about, several added problems have loomed large on our intellectual and moral horizon. Since the last two decades or so, universities have been reined in -- and to some extent 'captured' -- by the forces of neo-liberal globalisation and market imperatives. Knowledge has increasingly become commodified, with education turning into a burgeoning industry whose major concern is the bottom line. And as argued

by some scholars (for example, Barnett 1990: 25-26), with the renewed emphasis on value-for-money, accountability, efficiency, good management, resource allocation, performance indicators, etc., subjects that are favoured are those that make a direct contribution to the economy, namely science and technology, while the social sciences and humanities have to prove their relevance by developing skills-oriented courses.

As part of this trend, we are also witnessing the proliferation of pragmatic instruction and the undermining of scholarly transcendence, as universities tend to become outnumbered by 'professional' schools. As argued by Palous (1995: 177), while professional qualifications are important, "it is still basic scholarship and the original conceptualisation of problems which again and again shatters the intellectual chains which hold mental life in closed caves. It is this which opens the path to the greater universe within which we move whether as scientists or as citizens, as members of the world community or even as beings among other beings and therefore as people – sojourners in the created and creating universe."

If university education has been reoriented to serve the economy, productivity, or generally for the creation of material wealth, i.e., trapped in the quagmire of pragmatism and presentism, where then is the *idea* of higher education? What is *higher* about institutions of higher education that distinguishes them from other levels of education? Also, where can the quest for peace – an essential ingredient in higher education -- fit into the whole scheme of things?

I agree with Palous that one critical criterion of *higher* education is what he calls "education in transcendence", that is, "'a stepping beyond' which presupposes academic openness" (Palous 1995: 176). Or, in the words of Jaspers, higher education is more than the mere acquisition of knowledge; it requires a *sceptical and questioning attitude* to that which is encountered as knowledge (Barnett 1990: 22), thus encouraging "critical thinking within society" (Currie & Newson 1998: 3).[1]

The above discussion highlights the essential ingredients of university education, viz. the character of transcendence, openness and 'stepping beyond' as well as critical thinking, questioning attitude towards knowledge, and the speaking up for the truth. It is these elements that make university education *higher* than education in general, as these elements emancipate our minds from the shackles of closed intellectual caves or mental ghettoes. For, higher education is ultimately emancipatory and self-empowering – it should help us not only to see the light, but also to stand in the light, and bring light to others as well. The quest for peace through higher education is one such way of seeing the light, live in the light, and bring the light to others in this world darkened by the ominous clouds of war, hatred, and violence.

The Challenge as an Institution of Higher Learning

However, the challenge faced by the university is serious. The biggest challenge for it to maintain its character as an institution of *higher* learning, and to play the role of promoting the culture of peace, is both external and internal. There are two levels to the external challenge. First, as we have stated earlier, the forces of market-driven globalisation have more or less reined in or captured the universities, imposing upon them the TINA ideology, that "there is no alternative" to neo-liberal globalisation and its demands for market competitiveness, productivity, individualism, and so on. Second, inside the country where the universities are located, the powers-that-be -- that is, the state -- have more or less internalised the TINA ideology. The wave of corporatisation and privatisation initiated by the state that we saw in the 1980s and 1990s has been part and parcel of this process.

All these developments have impacted upon the universities in various ways. Thus, in terms of the internal challenge, the university leadership and the academic community has either willingly accepted or adopted the TINA ideology and the demands of the state, and went wholesale with it, or they put up some resistance, in order to soften the undermining impact of the neo-liberal and the statist ideologies. Nevertheless, the pressures and undercurrents are too strong. All these have led to restructuring, curriculum revamping

(in the name of market relevancy), greater emphasis on utilitarianism and commercialism, benchmarking, key performance indicators, and so on. The lecturers are reminded that they are employees who have to deliver according to the criteria set forth by the university board of directors, while the students are viewed as clients, rather than as seekers of knowledge, who together with the lecturers, engage in knowledge seeking and in the discovery of new knowledge. In short, the university ethos has changed, the market ethos has swept in, and with that, the university culture too has been slowly but surely undermined. Under such an onslaught, one wonders how much weight *is* and *can* be given to the *higher*, but less tangible, issues of human civilisation, namely that of peace, harmony and well-being?

Promoting a Culture of Peace: Reclaiming the Space in the University

In my view, universities should and can play the role of teaching and theorising peace, and the role of peace advocacy as well as peace building in the world, including in our region. Universities are in a position to do so because they are, by their nature, a 'marketplace' for the fermentation of diverse and even conflicting views and ideas; and with such a culture of "agreeing to disagree" as well as respect for each other, universities strive to achieve excellence within the framework of managing difference and maintaining peaceful and cordial relations. This kind of culture should continue to be strengthened not only in universities, but also promoted in society and in the world at large, so that it forms the cornerstone for conflict resolution and peace building.

But the space for the university to play its civilisational role creatively including the space for building a culture of peace and peace advocacy through the dissemination of the necessary knowledge and expertise, as well as through new research, has become much smaller today, not only because of the impact of external forces, but also because of the university's own doing. The eclipse of traditional 'soft' disciplines such as anthropology and sociology, history, and other humanities, in which these issues used to be debated, implies that less space and time are now being devoted to peace-related studies in the

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university. Even if it is given, it is meant to complement the 'hard' disciplines, i.e., those that are market-driven.

Yet the space can be enlarged provided the university community – from the vice chancellor to all the academic and administrative staff – get their act together and devise the necessary strategy and plans of action. Universities can contribute towards the quest for peace when -- and only when – the university leadership and the powers-that-be are committed to these ideals, especially that of respect for difference, and managing it in a peaceful and civilized manner within and outside the institutional framework of the university. At the same time, scholars -- as a thinking and speech community – are prepared to articulate their demand and support for such a role to be acted out by universities, and throw their intellectual and moral weight behind the global movement for a culture of peace. They also should take a principled position with regard to peace and conflict resolution at the global, regional, national and local levels without fear or favour.

I call the upholding of all these principles as the *civilisational* role of the university for the simple reason that these values of peace, freedom, pluralist acceptance of the other, transcendence, and so on form the cornerstone of human civilisation. Without these values, civilisation loses its humanity, and we will sink into the dark abyss of modern-day savagery.

To be fair, the university leadership has responded in certain ways. They have done it not so much on their own accord, but in collaboration with the United Nations efforts, channeled through its various agencies, such as UNESCO. Notable among these is the establishment of the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) in 1965, which has since advocated the achievement of world peace through education. In 1981, the IAUP passed a resolution that called all educational institutions "to establish curricula for peace and peace education programmes with the aid of ministries of education, private foundations, labour unions, business enterprises and other groups in society". The IAUP/UN Commission on Disarmament Education, Conflict Resolution and Peace devotes

its activities to influencing universities around the world to implement the resolution. In 1991, the Commission, in conjunction with the UN Office of Disarmament Affairs, began to work with universities in Latin America, Asia, the Middle East and Africa on the establishment of curricula and research on disarmament education, sustainable development, peace education, justice and human rights, conflict resolution and so on. The Commission has also recommended that universities develop the topics of disarmament education, sustainable development, human rights, national sovereignty, democratisation, globalisation, and racial, gender, ethnic and religious factors for teaching, research and services.[2]

However, the response from the universities has been slow, limited and uncoordinated. As pointed out by a member of the IAUP Executive Committee, Pettigrew (2001), "the modern university's response towards wars, conflicts and violence fuelled by racial, ethnic, gender and religious hatreds has been very limited." While acknowledging the contribution of NGOs and other organizations working with the refugees and other displaced persons, she observes that "there has not been any significant coordinated attempts by universities, either education or research, to diminish the impact of these hatreds." She maintains that the modern university must encourage the development of curriculum, research and service on the issue of racial, ethnic, gender, and religious hatreds so as to counteract the negative effects of such beliefs and possible subsequent actions.[3]

I believe that the observation made by Pettigrew also applies to universities in our region to some degree. A cursory look at these universities shows that many among the 150 members of ASAIHL have, at one time or other, introduced programmes containing elements that can promote a culture of peace through traditional disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, political science, history, international relations, law, and so on or through interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary approaches. Modules on gender, inter-ethnic coexistence, religious and civilisational studies, security, conflict management and resolution, preventive diplomacy, human development, globalisation, transnational migration, and so on have been introduced for undergraduates and some at postgraduate

level in many of these institutions. Besides teaching, research into various themes such as war and conflict resolution, ethnic relations, pluralism and cosmopolitanism, have been and are being conducted. Studies on Islam, ethnic relations and multiculturalism as well as religious and civilisational studies have been given some attention in various universities.

University Environment, Students' Cultural Enlargement and the Culture of Peace: Several Areas of Concern

While all these are positive developments, there are many grey areas and questions that need to be raised and clarified. I will highlight a few of these areas of concern for deliberation so that action can be taken to remedy them.

First, to what extent have these programmes been consciously planned and coordinated as part of peace-building efforts, as part and parcel of the global agenda for building a culture of peace? Or, have these efforts, in the main, been incidental, being planned by individual scholars or heads of programmes simply because other universities have done so, or that they have been trained in that field? In short, is there an institution-wide awareness and understanding about the need for universities to instill a culture of peace through their academic as well as co-curricula programmes, and through nourishing a culture of peace as the lifeblood of the university? I have not done a proper study on this subject, but my interaction with fellow scholars and university administrators in my own institution and other universities in Malaysia and elsewhere has strengthened my view that such consciousness and understanding is very limited and confined to certain pockets only.

Second, while a lot of hope may be placed on the efficacy of these programmes to promote a culture of peace among students and subsequently, the society at large, the result may not match the expectations. The efficacy of these programmes largely depends on a multiplicity of factors, namely substantive content, students' cultural experience, and university ethos. Of particular importance is the substantive content of knowledge designed for impartation to the students, the perspectives, standpoint and methodologies employed,

the underlying philosophy behind such studies, as well as their breadth and depth. We may offer beautifully designed programmes on gender, yet the students may not grasp the philosophy and perspectives underlying the gender issues, and they still may remain locked in the mental ghettoes of their own male or female-centric lenses. Similarly, we may offer ethnic studies, yet we may not be able to effectively reach out to the students' soul so that they can break down their walls of established ethnic prejudices, and see the broader picture that diversity is a blessing, not a curse. We also may offer courses on comparative religion, yet we may end up privileging one particular religion at the expense of the other, hence undermining the very objective of promoting inter-civilisational or inter-religious understanding and dialogue. In short, it is not only the programme, but the philosophy and actual substance of the programme itself (its vision and objectives), the expertise and disposition of the scholar(s) executing the programme, the method of teaching, and so on.

Third, tied up with what is said above is of course the kind of cultural experience the students should be engaged in and the university ethos. At universities, we expect students to experience some kind of cultural enlargement, not only by being exposed to the culturally rich materials on various themes pertaining to the culture of peace; at the same time, students should also experience the culture of peace in their lived-in experience with fellow students, with lecturers, as well as with the university administration. If conflicts had occurred as part of the students' experience, the manner these conflicts were resolved by the university authorities would be a telling example of whether the university lived up to its promise of objectivity and fairness in their conflict management and resolution. And, not less important is the university ethos. While academics may have succeeded in imparting culturally rich materials in the form of knowledge and information to the students, the latter may not be able to internalise them. Within a highly competitive environment in which the examination ethos in the university rules over the quest for knowledge, students mainly learn to pass examinations, and do not have the time and freedom to explore, to be creative and reflective, what more to internalise the important principles and lessons of their knowledge enterprise. With such an environment and ethos, carefully crafted programmes aimed at promoting a culture of peace remain beautiful on the

drawing boards and in the lecture hall, yet they may not have much multiplier effect in practice in the wider society.

Fourth, many universities, including those in Malaysia, have been flaunting the idea of internationalisation. While the internationalisation programme can be one of the ways in promoting a culture of peace, it is often not conceived in a comprehensive manner. More often than not, internationalisation is measured in terms of the number of students from other countries in one's institution, the number of international linkages, the international movement of senior academics for teaching and research purposes, the degree of the internationalisation of the curriculum, international research including grants received from international agencies, and so on. However, one critical dimension is often missing, that of *international ethos*. We cannot have internationalisation without an international ethos. I fully agree with Maurice Harari (1997: 7), a past Secretary-General of the IAUP, who argues that what makes a university *international*, "is the presence of a clear institution-wide positive attitude toward understanding better other cultures and societies, learning more about the political and economic inter-connectedness of humankind, a genuine interest in interacting with representatives of these other cultures and societies, a genuine desire to understand the major issues confronting the human and ecological survival of planet earth and to learn how to cooperate with others across national and cultural boundaries in seeking solutions to world problems, irrespective of one's own academic course of studies, career, profession or station in life. Where such a positive international institutional attitude exists, it inevitably translates itself gradually in the curriculum and the overall university '*international/intercultural ethos*'."

In the same way, we can argue that the various programmes introduced in the universities will not be effective in promoting a culture of peace unless there is a strong institution-wide peace ethos in the university, that conflict resolution is founded on the principles of justice, fair play, transparency, and objectivity. The culture of peace has to be upheld as part of the daily routine of the university. For all these to work, it boils down to one critical thing: political will and leadership by example. When the university leadership

is strongly committed to the culture of peace, and to the international ethos, sends appropriate signals, is open to criticisms and accepts different views with grace, this commitment can gradually filter down to professors, administrators and students, thus it becomes the culture of the whole university.

Fifth, promoting a culture of peace needs a grounded theory of peace and humanism. To my mind, the task of theorising peace, terror and violence, and of humanism should be high on the university agenda today to combat the culture of war and violence, and promote a culture of peace and harmony. A revisit of the conventional theories developed in different contexts and circumstances is highly necessary. For example, why is terrorism on the rise in the world today? To what extent can the methods used in the global war against terror contribute towards achieving peace and eliminate violence? What is the relationship between terrorism and justice and freedom? These are both theoretical as well as political questions.

The concept of humanism too should be revisited and theorised afresh, by making it a vital component of what the late Edward Said (1979, 1993) referred to as a "humanist project". Humanism is a project with the objective of mutual understanding and peaceful co-existence, of creating understanding between peoples, cultures and civilisations, of cultivating the spirit of community among mankind as opposed to domination of the other that leads to injustice and suffering. This stands in opposition to orientalism whose objective is understanding the other in order to subjugate them and replace their history and culture with that of the hegemon or the coloniser. The humanist project will ultimately 'open up' to the other with generosity and hospitality, thus developing and enriching the humanist spirit.[4] The humanist project thus constitutes a very critical ingredient in the whole enterprise of promoting a culture of peace and harmony.

However, theorising complex matters such as war, peace and humanism, and reflecting on these issues to translate them into a humanist project, requires certain qualities of the mind and soul that I have talked about earlier -- that of transcendence, of

'stepping beyond', critical thinking, questioning attitude towards received wisdom, and the courage to speak up for, and defend, truth. It is these characteristics of the mind, the intellectual faculties, that will contribute towards the examination and interpretation of facts critically and objectively, and abstract from facts the theoretical arguments. This agenda can be executed effectively only if the basic or fundamental values and ethos of the university have been reclaimed and strengthened, as these faculties are absolutely necessary for human advancement. In other words, we have to go back to the idea of what *higher* education is all about – the emancipation of the mind, and the self-empowering of the individual. In short, we have to reclaim the civilisational role of the university to embark upon the humanist project and develop the culture of peace.

Concluding Remarks

Having said all the above, we cannot pretend we can solve the problems through the various programmes offered to the students. The duration at the university is too short for that purpose. The academic programmes for the students, research as well as various other programmes discussed above as well as the demands on university leadership are part of the whole story regarding the role of universities in the quest for peace. However, the target group attending our courses and other activities consist of those with no real power. In the main, they are not the perpetrators of war, nor the violators of human rights. Many of them can become potential conflict resolution managers, policy planners, media professionals, and so on. Educating them is, of course, highly important.

However, we should ask the crucial question: Who are some of the key perpetrators – actual and potential -- of war and violence? Looking at the world situation today, the perpetrators of war and massive violence are those holding power and the means to impose their power – viz., those who occupy the various command posts in the state power structure, especially in the most powerful nation in the world. They are not ordinary citizens. At the other end of the spectrum, the perpetrators also consist of leaders and followers of certain movements who – in the name of justice for the victims – rise up to

oppose such power. Both these sets of actors – state and non-state -- should be the direct target groups for such programmes to promote a culture of peace. The task of the university is to be aware of this, and to say so publicly. The task of scholars – as an intellectual and moral community – is to expose this; they should have the courage to speak up for the truth and stand up in the face of power, as the conscience of society. Otherwise, all the talk about building a culture of peace, but not exposing the violators of peace, becomes a mere academic exercise.

In this regard, I am reminded of a speech by Professor Ingrid Moses (2003), the current President of the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP), who is also the Vice-Chancellor of the University of New England, Australia on the issue of leadership role. She enjoins vice-chancellors and presidents "to use their moral authority to speak out on issues, so that their field of action and influence is extended beyond the boundaries of institutions and international organisations to the wider public.... Engagement with the community is now seen as one of the core values and functions of universities. Engagement with the community does not only mean liasing with industry and the professions. It also means engaging with the public on issues, be they war and peace; economic and social issues; regional and global issues, or issues of attitudes – racism, xenophobia, intolerance. And we need to encourage our faculty staff to engage in public debates and support them when they do. I trust that we ourselves have the moral courage; that our own institutions will support us; and that our governments will accept that a legitimate role of universities and their leaders and faculty staff is to be the social conscience of society."[5]

This brings me to the close of this lecture, that the university can advance the cause of peace and promote a culture of peace if it reclaims its civilisational role and intrinsic responsibility. I would like to reiterate the views of Palous that the most significant element of the university's mission is openness and transcendence, as well as standing up to pragmatism and totalitarian or consumerist manipulation. His warning should be taken note of seriously. To quote, "If universities do not fulfill their tasks in the spirit of their intrinsic

responsibility, they will not be the only ones to suffer injury (indeed, from the purely material point of view they may not outwardly suffer at all!). It will be the world that suffers" (Palous 1995: 178).

I trust that we can contribute meaningfully towards the global effort to end the injury suffered by the world, and also by the university if we put our act together and reclaim the civilisational role of the university. The current ASAIHL conference on the role of universities in the quest for peace is therefore a laudable and timely move in this direction.

Notes

[1] As Currie and Newson (1998: 3) put it, "(Universities) are institutions where broadly based knowledge is supposed to be developed and disseminated widely, for social purposes. If the university is silenced, who will be able to maintain critical judgments within society and speak with a critical voice to the wider community? ... They (universities) must be more than engines for economic productivity and competitiveness."

[2] This paragraph is liberally adapted from a speech by Pettigrew (2001), President Emeritus, SUNY at Old Westbury, Member of the IAUP Executive Committee, and Chair of the IAUP/UN Commission on Disarmament Education, Conflict Resolution and Peace.

[3] Pettigrew (2001) suggests that universities should also develop a new paradigm for peace and stability. "The new paradigm will not rely upon old style diplomacy after the fact or after violence, war and conflict have taken place .... (but instead) promote preventive diplomacy" (confidence building, early warning system based on information and fact finding, etc). She is confident that "the modern university can use education as a tool for the transformation of the world from a history of violence, war and conflict to peace and stability."

[4] These views were expressed by Edward Said in his final essay, published in French in *Le Monde Diplomatique* in August 2003. This essay was written 26 years after his classical work, *Orientalism*. As I have no access to the English version, I have to rely on the article written by Mazeni Alwi (2004), "Remembering Edward Said: From Orientalism to humanism" in which he gave a rendering of Said's essay from French into English.

[5] The speech was made on the occasion of the 80th anniversary of Daito Bunku University, which fell on 19 November 2003.

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