



story

The Eternal Quest for Peace

peace: 1: a state of tranquility or quiet: as **a:** freedom from civil disturbance, **b:** a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom.

In contrast to the dictionary, Youthink! readers submitted a wide range of meanings for peace: Respect. Tolerance. Safety. Absence of fear. Freedom from oppression and poverty.

Perhaps these varying definitions are reflective of its elusive nature. One could argue that true peace does not exist anywhere in the world, and never has. And yet, throughout human history people have dreamed, struggled, and died in the quest for peace. Unfortunately, reaching a lasting peace is much harder than starting a war. It remains a major challenge to humanity, and the hope of attaining it has always coexisted with wars and violence.

How Is Peace Achieved?

Achieving peace is essential for long-term development and putting an end to poverty. To this end, humanitarians, policymakers, politicians, and philosophers have formulated different methods of peacekeeping, whether through diplomacy, reintegration of combatants, disarmament, or other means.

"Sustainable peace," which is the ultimate goal of all peace operations, occurs when peace continues in a recently-conflicted area even after the peacekeepers have left. Attaining this depends on the country's capacity to resolve all its conflicts by means other than war. There are many ways of doing so:

Conflict resolution and post-conflict justice. There are different ways of ensuring post-conflict justice. In recent years a number of international and local courts have been established to prosecute war criminals. While these courts and tribunals work, in the sense that they enforce justice and act as deterrents, they also sometimes hinder the peace process. Fear of punishment after the conflict often prevents the warring parties from laying down their weapons and ending the fight.

An alternative to punishment is declaring amnesty or exiling war criminals. For example, in an attempt to end the four decades-long civil war in Colombia, the government

(continued)

How Is Peace Achieved? (continued)

initiated a reconciliation program offering jobs to guerrillas in exchange for peace.

But while such measures can be an important part of peace negotiations and settlements, sustainable peace can often depend upon punishing wrongdoers and compensating victims of war.

Governance. Good governance plays a key role in rebuilding countries after conflict. Countries where violence has just ended are often in highly volatile transition states, and face the enormous task of reconstruction. During this unstable period, it's essential that the rebuilding efforts are transparent, with efficient governance structures. For example, in building a national healthcare or education system, the resources must clearly go toward help citizens, and not to corrupt officials.

Governments that provide services and security to their citizens in a transparent way improve the quality of life for their people, which creates stability. Good governance can also prevent outbreaks of new violence by establishing more peaceful procedures of conflict resolution.

Disarmament and demobilization. In postwar regions, it is essential that weapons are not easily available because they can create extremely dangerous and volatile situations. Reducing or removing military forces and equipment reduces the likelihood of violence. So, disarmament is an important step toward stability. It often overlaps with demobilization, which involves discharging people from the armed forces and reintegrating them into society. Both disarmament and integrating ex-combatants to civilian life are fundamental aspects of the peace process.

Empowering young people. Peacebuilding processes often overlook them, but young survivors of violent conflict are an important part of the peace process. They have been involved in conflicts in every part of the globe: estimates suggest that 300,000 young people under the age of 18 are now or have recently

(continued)

THINK ABOUT IT

“I like that first definition of peace—tranquility and quiet. I think we take our peace for granted. It is a simple luxury we enjoy for reading, writing, meeting people, discussing ideas and even developing our strategies for helping the poor. Imagine how difficult our work would be in an environment without tranquility and quiet? And then imagine trying to build a future for your family and country without peace. This explains why peace is a foundation of development.”

—Gary Milante
Researcher on Post-Conflict Transitions at the World Bank

LEARN MORE

Explore these sites related to peace and conflict:

Peace Quotes

www.cultureofpeace.org/quotes/peace-quotes.htm

UN Peacekeeping Operations

www.un.org/Depts/dpko/dpko/

Uppsala Conflict Database

www.pcr.uu.se/database/

GET INVOLVED

“[Peace] is to be in harmony with myself and the rest.”
—Mexican Youthink! visitor, 14

Read more comments about peace, and add your own, on the Youthink! website (youthink.worldbank.org/getinvolved/topics/peace.php).

Also, learn about the **Global Peace Index**. Read the Youthink! Webitorial (youthink.worldbank.org/getinvolved/webitorials/peaceindex.php).

How Is Peace Achieved? (continued)

been involved in armed conflict, and another 500,000 have been recruited into military or paramilitary forces. Many of them only really know a life of conflict, and have missed out on skills and education necessary for employment. They require special programs and assistance for the transition to civilian life. The World Bank has been involved in such projects in the Great Lakes region of Africa.

What Comes Next?

War is terrible and tragic. In its aftermath, people are dead, infrastructure has been destroyed, and it often takes decades for the country to rebuild just to get back to where they were before the war. But at least there is the hope that the people of a postwar country will be able to rebuild better, resolve the issues that led to the conflict and actually build a lasting peace.