

Operation Peace through Unity's mid-term report on a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World to UNESCO

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I. Actions accomplished by OPTU with regard to promoting a culture of peace:

Responding to the call in the 1999 UN Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace for people everywhere and within all walks of life actively to participate in the creation of a culture of peace, OPTU embarked (early 2000) upon a culture of peace sculpture project which invited cooperation and interaction between peoples, first within the local and then within the wider community.

With the help of the regional Art Gallery (the Sarjeant Gallery) and with the approval of the Wanganui District Council (who also donated a site for it on public ground) a culture of peace sculpture competition was organized for artists of the region. The winning design, chosen by 3 independent judges, was announced at a multi-cultural celebration in the Gallery. A souvenir programme was prepared for the occasion by a young art student, which included the Manifesto 2000 and the symbol of Nicholas Roerich's peace banner.

The chosen design "Handspan" is a large work of art, about 20 meters in diameter, which rises in a double spiraled pathway to a height of 3 meters with walls on each side, covered with more than 4000 terracotta hand casts made from hand prints of community members of all ages, each one named, leaving room for more hands to be added in the future.

The construction of this unique structure drew together people from all parts of the Wanganui community, requiring the combined skills, ingenuity and cooperation of engineers, architects, electricians, plumbers, plasterers and construction workers, as well as the continuing work by the artists of the gathering, and then firing, hand prints from school children and other people of all ages (from 3 months to 106 years old) within the community.

On the first, fixed, International Day of Peace, the sculpture was dedicated to a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World by the New Zealand Governor-General, Dame Silvia Cartwright at a ceremony on the historic hill at the heart of Wanganui City where it is situated, neighbouring the Regional Museum, the Art Gallery, the Public Library and the War Memorial.

At the east entrance a plaque is inscribed with a quote from the UN Charter: "... to live together in peace with one another as good neighbours" as a definition of a culture of peace. Two removable aluminum poles are available for those who wish to fly the banner of peace or any other banner on special occasions.

A coffee table sized book "Wanganui Culture of Peace – 2002" was published as a memento and public record, describing in pictures and text, the process of building the sizeable sculpture and the thoughts behind it. The photos feature some of the many people involved, and the text includes poems by local writers, the blessing ceremonies led by the Maori kaumatua overseeing this initiative, and other contributions.

*Key difficulties encountered by our organization in building the sculpture:*

Fundraising for a vision and a work of art to make this vision visible, is difficult. However OPTU found that if the vision is not held tightly as personal property and presented as a shared area for cooperation, then practical difficulties, personality problems and even monetary issues, are overcome.

It demonstrated to us all involved, that a culture of peace is not built by 'perfect' people; but by staying together, and overcoming together, challenges as they appear, nothing really can prevent the vision take form.

Therefore OPTU believes that in some way – however modestly - all the eight 'action areas' defined by UNESCO were expressed in our local community through the process of building the sculpture "Handspan", dedicated to a culture of peace and non-violence for the children of the world.

## II. General Progress towards a Culture of Peace

*Progress:* Whether on local or global scale OPTU believes that while polarization is dividing and shattering social structures and relationships on all levels, peoples everywhere are rising to the challenges and accepting the opportunities they bring for change. There is also, we believe, an increasing realization that changes must start here, in me, my family, my community.

Within every culture, people – not least women – are becoming more outspoken and also more ready to listen to others' point of view. There is less willingness to 'ignore' issues; more willingness to participate in re-establishing new relationships across all borders.

*Obstacles:* Fear, mistrust, and acts of violence, are feeding - and feeding upon - the chaotic and traumatic state of affairs around the world. This state of fear, suspicion and mindless eruptions of violence is reflected even in the lives of people within small communities in relatively peaceful countries.

It is a very real challenge to learn how to move beyond this debased and outmoded approach to life. Working towards a new culture, a culture of heart, is a challenge and also an opportunity to show the courage of resolve and commitment unrelentingly to pursue the realization of a new civilization

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*Medium- or long-term result of the creation of culture of peace sculpture*

“*Handspan*”: The sculpture is becoming a focal point for many activities, not least involving children. It is also visited by tourists and groups of NGOs, such as the Quaker Community, the UNA and the Friendship Association, and some of their visitors from abroad have shown interest in a similar culture of peace project in their own towns

### III. Partnerships and Cooperation:

The building of the sculpture “*Handspan*”, and the since then yearly commemorations of the International Day of Peace, have created various multi-cultural partnerships for peace in our community.

OPTU also became a founding member of the *NGO Committee on Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns*, a committee of the Conference of Non-governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), and represented on the recently formed sub committee for a culture of peace.

OPTU has been receiving UNESCO material and newsletter, particularly with regard to the state of refugees, and is aware of the UNESCO website. We are continuously making the public aware of this material.

Through our quarterly publication, “*Many to Many*” (published since 1982), OPTU networks information on UN activities as well as on some of the many projects and initiatives of people throughout the world working for a new and better global neighbourhood. It is sent to some 50 countries and is also available as e-mail and on our websites.

### IV. Commitment towards New Initiatives and New Directions for the second half of the International Decade:

1. In a pamphlet (4000 copies printed so far) ‘creating a culture of peace’ OPTU offers its thoughts on the essential role of culture in the lives and relationships of us all, and highlights the trailblazing work for a culture of peace by the renowned Russian thinker and artist Nicholas Roerich in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the “*Roerich Pact*” was signed by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1935 and later by many other Heads of State), as well as the Manifesto 2000 initiative by the Nobel Peace Laureates, signed by millions of people worldwide.

Through combining the ancient symbol for trinity, found in cultures throughout the world and used by Nicholas Roerich to signify a culture of peace on the banner he designed, with the Manifesto 2000 guidelines encircling this symbol, OPTU has sought to create a logo that symbolizes the bringing together of the efforts of both governments and peoples for a culture of peace. OPTU has used this logo for cooperation between peoples and governments in a newly made banner, hoping that it will be seen to be honouring the work for peace already done and help giving strength and inspiration to the continuation of the work for a new culture.

2. The Declaration and Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace emphasizes the need for governments to cooperate with civil society for the promotion of a culture of peace.

With this in mind OPTU will continue its culture of peace initiative by supporting the campaign for the creation of a Department or Ministry for Peace within the New Zealand Government.

In a letter to the New Zealand Prime Minister we argued that: *“while Freedom of speech and expression and Freedom of worship have improved greatly since WWII, Freedom from want and from fear are still plaguing our world. The build-up of armaments has not created a sense of security, and neither has globalisation been successful in eliminating poverty or creating sustainable use of the world’s natural resources.”*

In the letter we proposed that such a ministry would help to:

- Identify root-causes of conflict, disharmony and hostility between nations and peoples;

- Actively promote the employment of conflict-resolution, mediation, negotiation and other peacemaking and peace-building skills, and encourage that these skills become common practice;

- Become a focal point for active and constructive cooperation between government (and its various departments) and civil society for the creation of a fairer, healthier, more prosperous and more enlightened local/global community.

We hope to see such a ministry become a ‘meeting place’ between government and peoples from all parts of society as outlined in the Culture of Peace resolution (i.e. parents, students, teachers, unions, artists, business, medical profession, environmentalists, politicians, lawyers...) within which the concerns of each of these special issues could be openly discussed and find solutions that would be beneficial to all parties: solutions which could then be worked upon and implemented by the appropriate ministry, institution, organization or group of people.

3. OPTU is currently in the process of creating a new website, dedicated to strengthening the ongoing work throughout the world to transform a culture of violence and mistrust into a culture of peace – a culture of heart.

Thank you for this opportunity to tell about our contribution, however modest, to the global wide striving by humanity to bring into being a new civilization.

