

Peace as a Cultural Issue and the Carter Center's Work Towards Peace

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Peace has many definitions including the end of a period of war or the state in which war is not occurring. While this is true there are many aspects that contribute to a period of peace especially, world peace. Cultural beliefs leading to inequality and fragility have a destabilizing impact on peace and are extremely important to consider when working towards it.

Culture despite its unifying abilities is also a cause for unrest. The significance of cultural beliefs can not be dismissed for the cause of peace, however, “conflicts are increasingly fueled by ethnic and belief differences, grievances and identity misinterpretation” (UNESCO). The increase of cultural spread due to advanced technology has sparked conflict as it occurs and continues to ignite the flames of unrest as it continues. Cultural spread has changed in the modern world, as of now “the protection of culture is not only a cultural issue; it has become a security imperative” (UNESCO). The role of culture is to uphold traditional beliefs of certain groups of people and allow them to express those beliefs freely. This right should and will continue to be protected, however, its role as a conflict starter should be recognized as well.

“Economic, social and political inequality is an inherent feature of social complexity and has profound effects on human societies” (Houle et. al.). These three types of inequality are considered horizontal inequalities and are recognized as sources of disruption. Horizontal inequality produces civil conflict between cultural groups, increases ethnic voting, and destabilizes democracy (Houle et. al.). Cultural beliefs are an important aspect of horizontal inequality because they are related to political actions. Which causes cultural inequality and exploitation as a motivator for unrest. Cultural norms also have a strong impact on the view of political actions and therefore political inequality. Unequal political treatment will be widely accepted by the majority requiring it fits their cultural beliefs. Political inequality is severely

intertwined with economic inequality as well. The recognition of inequality as a source of conflict and its strong connection to culture is extremely important in the fight for peace.

Global fragility is becoming increasingly worse in recent years. Fragility has become a focus for global improvement in areas including conflict, the cost of conflict, and international policy (OECD). Fragility can be defined as “the absence or breakdown of the social contract between people and their government” (Lindborg). Fragility is the root cause of numerous societal issues including large amounts of inequality and conflict. This includes cultural conflicts such as Boko Haram and Islamic State. Not only can fragility cause conflict, but it can also be a result of conflict. A never ending cycle of fragility leading to conflict and worse fragility as a result.

All three of these issues are extremely important to address in the process of creating a more peaceful world. This starts at a small level. Organizations that contribute to peace are extremely important in today's world, especially organizations that address base issues of conflict. This includes fragility, culture, and inequality problems previously established as extremely important to peace.

The Carter Center finds a way to address important root issues of peace world wide. Originally started by President Jimmy Carter and his wife Rosalynn the Carter Center declares “a fundamental commitment to human rights and the alleviation of human suffering, the Center seeks to prevent and resolve conflicts, enhance freedom and democracy, and improve health” (Carter Center).

To address human rights within the Human Rights Program of the Carter Center there are initiatives such as the Israel- Palestine, and Women’s Rights Initiatives. These programs work towards equality. The Israel-Palestine initiative is focused on Palestinians’ “aspirations for

self-determination and human rights while affirming Israel's right to exist and protecting its security" (Carter Center). To do this the center is helping support and empower human rights leaders in both countries while funding human rights and distributing grants. In 2023 the Carter Center, the Embassy of Sweden in Zambia along with the Embassies of Ireland and Finland met to discuss 'Securing a Seat at the Table' a program which aims to include more women in politics, and allow youth, along with people with disabilities, in decisions that affect them. The Carter Center addresses equality in any way possible.

Cultural conflict is a large part of the Carter Center's work especially the Israel- Palestine Initiative. There are many programs working starting in 2008 that focus on Israel and Palestinian human rights, culture, and more. This includes the Conflict Resolution and Democracy Program, field offices, and partnership with the United Nations Development Programme and Palestinian civil society. The Carter Center takes both cultural sides into account when working on projects such as this with the aim for conflict resolution rather than taking a side.

Fragility is the root of many conflicts and is therefore addressed in almost every project and program. However, one of the programs that specifically addresses fragility is the Democracy Program specifically based in the U.S. Elections. The work towards voting outside of partisan identity, the Faith Forward Network, and Message Dissemination and Election Education all display the fragility of democracy. The Carter Center addresses fragility not simply in foreign countries or 3rd world countries; it also remains in the United States.

Peace is a goal that has numerous aspects, some of which are dismissed. It is essential that these issues are addressed in the process of achieving peace through organizations. The Carter Center does incredible work in many base areas of conflict that are typically ignored or

dismissed despite their importance. While there is always more work to be done the Carter Center is a great example of progress and continuous work towards peace.

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