

# Promoting a Culture of Peace in the South Caucasus

## Education for Peace in the Armenia-Azerbaijan Post-Conflict Period

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*“Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.”*

– UNESCO, Constitution, Preamble

I remember it like it was yesterday. “Armenians? Why? What is happening?” My mother exclaimed as she expressed surprise and even shock upon hearing the news about how ethnic-Azerbaijanis were being cleansed from Armenia in 1987. Her reaction was a typical one: most Azerbaijanis had no inkling that every single last ethnic-Azerbaijani would be cleansed from their homes in Armenia in a few short years and that, soon thereafter, Armenian forces would occupy around 20 percent of Azerbaijan, ethnically cleansing every Azerbaijani from there, too. “We all lived in peace,” was a common refrain heard amongst Azerbaijanis.

This IDD Analytical Policy Brief provides a brief analysis of the origins of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict as a starting point from which to examine potential reforms in education for peace measures as a powerful tool in the post-conflict peacebuilding process.

### *Understanding the Roots of Conflict Relations*

Johan Galtung, a father of contemporary academic peace studies, [argues](#) that “peace is not a property of one party alone, but a property of the relation between parties.”

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However, the author [thinks](#) that, in order to bring about peace and end violence, it is important to understand the roots of conflict/violence. Hence, Galtung [infers](#) that “the root of a conflict is always a contradiction, an incompatibility, or a clash of goals which then easily translates into a class of parties and violent behavior. At any stage in this process negative attitudes may enter—and attitudes, behavior, and contradictions then feed into each other in vicious cycles.” He thus [defines](#) violence as “the effects applied to people to fall behind their physical and mental potentials and draws a wide-ranging framework from economic inadequacies to wars, from ideological pressures to threats.”

Galtung provides a threefold classification of violence: direct, structural, and cultural violence. Structural violence is caused by political mechanisms, processes, and institutions that ensure the satisfaction of identity, reputation, and security needs. In contrast, cultural violence is fed by anger, fear, and hatred that arise from the parties’ not understanding or misunderstanding each other. According to Galtung, structural and cultural violence is the source of invisible conflicts; this violence directly turns into violence and becomes visible. In this context, conflict is a variable process in which structural, cultural, and direct violence affect each other.

Hence, the violence in the context of the conflict over Karabakh was sparked structurally. The Armenian territorial claim to Azerbaijan, in modern history, stemmed from its origins in the eighteenth century when Peter the Great [issued a decree](#) allowing Armenians to settle along the western coast of the Caspian and other parts of Azerbaijan, with the army instructed to “displace” the local Azerbaijani population using all means at their disposal. In the wake of the Turkmenchay Treaty (1828), 40,000 Armenians were resettled in Azerbaijan. In the wake of the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), 90,000 Armenians were resettled in Azerbaijan. Mostly, these resettlements took place on the territory of the Nakhchivan, Erivan, and Karabakh khanates. In varying degrees, such policies continued during the Soviet period. As the implosion of the USSR came to pass and gave way to the First Karabakh War, around 20 percent of Azerbaijani territory came under Armenian occupation. During this period, nearly one million Azerbaijanis were ethnically cleansed by Armenian forces. This fed the visible cultural violence against Azerbaijani and caused hatred between the two nations—as did irredentist language in Armenia’s Declaration of Independence (which was then referenced in the preamble to the Armenian Constitution), and, of course, the act of secession by Karabakh’s ethnic-Armenian leadership (see Javid Gadirov’s chapter in [Liberated Karabakh](#) (2021), titled “[International Law and the Karabakh Question](#),” for more on this). Regrettably, the Armenian Constitution still contains this reference.

And thus, we return to Galtung and to his definition of peace. In his study “What is Peace Research?” Galtung [defines](#) “negative peace” as the absence of human violence and war and “positive peace” as the absence of structural violence. One could say that, according to this definition, “negative peace” was largely achieved in the context of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict through the [tripartite statement](#) that ended the Second Karabakh War on 10 November 2020 and triggered a peace process. Its successful

conclusion (through the signing of a peace treaty, the adoption of an amended Armenian Constitution, etc.) would constitute the instauration of an era of “positive peace.”

## *Re-Learning to Live Together*

But is there more to it than that? My short answer is “yes.” Consider the recent formulations by two thoughtful observers of the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict. The first is by Onnik James Krikorian, who in December 2023 [wrote](#) of the importance of transforming public discourse in the context of framing relations between the two states and the two nations, warning that

It won't be quick, and it won't be easy. Some civil society organisations have attempted to do this in the past, but their reach remains negligible, especially among mainstream society. The mainstream mass media will be important here, while tangible and visible confidence-building measures will be necessary where it matters—on the ground and involving everyday folk. Hopefully, that can finally occur next year if an agreement is signed. But it should become a new reality, even if it isn't yet.

The second formulation is by Areg Kochinyan, who [stated](#) on 7 March 2024 at the Rondeli Security Conference in Tbilisi, “I recently read that there was a poll in Azerbaijan saying that more than 70 percent wants a peace treaty with Armenia, and a similar situation is in Armenia. So, [...] the absolute majority [...] of the societies want a peace treaty. Another question, of course, is [...] re-learning to live together. That's already a question of decades, [...] but the most important fact is that the absolute majority of both populations, right now, is ready to sign the peace treaty.”

I agree with both. Ordinary folks on the ground in both countries want peace, and what we need is mass media, working in tandem with organizations that can have a real impact on the ground, participating in tangible and impactful peacebuilding processes. And that is why I recommend various measures that fall under the education-for-peace rubric to help societies re-learn to live together.

## *Recommendations*

*How, then, do we reform education as a pathway to developing a culture of peace within the context of the Armenian-Azerbaijani post-conflict period?*

The beginning of an answer lies in defining a “[culture of peace](#).” UN General Assembly resolution 53/243 provides a [Declaration on a Culture of Peace](#). Article 1 defines it as a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life based on: (a) Respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation; (b) Full respect for the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of States and non-intervention in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any State, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law; (c) Full respect for and promotion of all human rights and fundamental freedoms; (d) Commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts; (e) Efforts to meet the developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations; (f) Respect for and promotion of the right to development; (g) Respect for and promotion of equal rights and opportunities for women and men; (h) Respect for and promotion of the right of everyone to

freedom of expression, opinion and information; (i) Adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations; and fostered by an enabling national and international environment conducive to peace.

Article 2 of the Declaration adds that “progress in the fuller development of a culture of peace comes about through values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life conducive to the promotion of peace among individuals, groups and nations.”

The first clause of Article 3 specifies that the “fuller development of a culture of peace is integrally linked to: (a) promoting peaceful settlement of conflicts, mutual respect and understanding and international cooperation.”

The entirety of Article 4 reads: “Education at all levels is one of the principal means to build a culture of peace.”

And the entirety of Article 7 reads: “The educative and informative role of the media contributes to the promotion of a culture of peace.”

It thus seems that the most significant means through which a culture of peace is to be promoted is through peace education. *How, then, do we establish a culture of peace through education?*

One way forward, which should be carried out in the context of the next phase of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process (i.e., once a peace treaty is signed) but also include Georgia, would involve talks on a trilateral agreement between the three South Caucasus countries, on the basis of the Declaration on a Culture of Peace, which was adopted without a vote (i.e., by acclamation and thus by consensus), and other such documents, on the promotion of a culture of peace through peace education.

For example, the Education Ministries of the three countries could explore ways to develop a common curriculum, common textbook, and common education program.

- Such a program could include modules on anti-bias education, truth-telling, reconciliation, and post-conflict justice, emergency education, genocide education and its prevention, perspective-taking, preventing violent extremism, public education of peace processes, transitional justice, and international law.
- It could provide for a “values and ethics education” teaching approach applied to inform the learners of the values, norms, and guiding principles that should inform societies interested in maintaining peace with their neighbors and commencing a genuine process of reconciliation.
- It could set the parameters of a conflict-resolution curriculum by teaching pupils/students to become peacemakers, which involves creating a cooperative climate that encourages parties to reach mutually acceptable solutions to disagreements, as well as practical skills in attentive listening, effective communication, constructive dialogue, and other positive techniques to arrive at a win-win solution to conflicts.

- It could also provide for an “[interethnic and intercultural education](#)” curriculum to promote awareness programs informing its pupils/students about the sufferings of different groups in the conflict to reduce hostilities and promote empathy for the pain of others.
- It could promote policy-oriented yet academically rigorous research that would holistically promote peace in the region, consistent with the [approaches and themes](#) championed by the [Global Campaign for Peace Education](#) and similar organizations. Emphasizing the “[restorative practices](#)” teaching approach championed by organizations like the [International Institute for Restorative Practices](#) should be incorporated whenever possible. This could include specific modules on “[Education for Sustainable Development Goals](#),” starting with SDG6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) by emphasizing the transboundary implications of water misuse.

At bottom, the promotion of a culture of peace through peace education is about transforming war minds into peace minds. And it is about laying the foundation for a sustainable, shared future. As [Alpaslan Özerdem](#), Dean of the Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter School for Peace and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, put it in the Winter 2023-2024 edition of *Baku Dialogues*, “It is time to dream of a shared future in the South Caucasus. Dreaming is not utopic. Dreaming is part of leadership. It is time to change and transform the narratives of conflict into peace.”