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“TOWARDS COMMUNITY PEACE AND JUSTICE MUSEUMS OF CANADA”

This concept statement examines resources that give reasons for making of Community Peace and Justice Museums in Canada. These resources are embedded in community histories and are also part of the Canadian living traditions that reflect on the national character. The ethos of the Canadian society is its unifying national fabric of multiple indigenous, community and ethnic societies living in a nation that is also one of the least militaristic in the Northern Hemisphere. It was reported in the International Network of Peace Museums, Newsletter No.15 (2002:Bradford,England) that Canada leads the world in having the most peace sites.

About the author

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For mention see <http://www.education.mcgill.ca/herald/Mar12-2003.html>

2001 UN recognition: *Unsung Hero of Dialogue among Civilizations*.

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Awarded *Cultural Ambassador of Peace* by the Interfaith Committee of Slums of Nairobi after initiating reconciliation dialogues and healing based on traditions following ethnic massacres. (August, 2002).

Introduction

Peace and Justice Museums seek to give importance to personalities, organizations and communities that recount and valorise experiences and values of justice and peace that the human societies through mistakes and trials, struggles and sacrifices, and most importantly through dialogue continue to aspire for. Constitutions of nations and Human Rights documents enshrine this aspiration.

The international directory of Peace Museums published by UN (1998: Geneva) includes centres that exhibit material culture of peace, pictures, documents that tell the story of peace building, freedom, individual and community endeavours for dialogue for justice and human rights. One example is the World Centre for Peace, Freedom and Human Rights at Verdun in France that was founded in 1994 and another is the National Civil Rights Museum in Memphis, USA that was founded in 1991.

The directory of world peace museums lists three types of Peace Museums. One type is developed to commemorate and learn from an event of violence and injustice. Peace Museums of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan are examples of such museums. Another type celebrates personalities who worked in mediation and for non-violence. Museums in this category include the Gandhi Museums in South Africa and India. There is also a Peace Museum on the life of Albert Lutuli in South Africa. The third type is a peace museum that celebrates organizations and groups of people who have stood for peace. The League of Nations Museum, founded in 1946 in Geneva and the Nobel Peace Prize Museum to be opened this year in 2005 in Oslo, are listed in this category. The Peace Palace and Library in The Hague, founded in 1913, is a home for the International Court of Justice, the Permanent Court of Arbitration and The Hague Academy of International Law. Since 1999 it has become the home of a museum on International Law and the International Court.

Many Peace Museums in Europe and Asia were started after the First and Second World Wars. These houses have documents and artefacts that pertain to negotiation procedures and treaties between nations for allocations and reallocations of large land areas and resources. They also house collections of objects that are reminders of the violence of war and to the gradual processes of bringing peace through displays that evoke dialogue. Peace Museums are places for recollection, healing and paying tribute to those personalities, organizations and groups of people who fought against war in midst of wars and strived for mediation and dialogue under difficult circumstances. There are peace museums in Belgium, Italy, Viet Nam, Switzerland, Kenya, Uzbekistan and Germany that draw on the character of their national experiences. More recently one such a museum gallery was opened in Bradford in England. The new European Museum for Peace in Stadtschlaining aims to present global perspectives for peace, dialogue and reconciliation. The first Peace Museum in the world was opened in Lucern (Switzerland) in 1902 and in 2002 it celebrated the hundredth anniversary of its opening. (This museum however, did not survive World War I).

Community Peace and Justice Museums of Canada: A Vision

Canada does not have Peace and Justice Museums. Nevertheless in Canada there are vast resources to build on for making of these museums. For example there is a large countrywide collection of peace artefacts that testify to an all-embracing community rooted practice of mediation, traditions of dialogue and non-violence reflecting on a celebrated historical foundation of making of the Canadian values. Many Canadian Museums are a testimony to this tradition. There are approximately two million artefacts in Canadian Museums collected over centuries that can be sorted out and among them many can be identified as items of material culture for peace, dialogue, reconciliation and justice. Wampum belts of the First Nations are an example as are the peace pipes, bird feathers and personal possessions of Aboriginal chiefs who led major negotiation rites and peace treaties. The sacred stone known as the Manitou Stone in Alberta reflects on veneration of symbols of beauty, spirituality and peace. Material culture of eminent personalities and pioneer communities engaged in building peace and social

justice against odds of war and injustice can also be regarded as peace artefacts when they tell stories of non-violence and quest for social justice.

Aboriginal experience

Currently Canada is engaged in correcting injustices against native peoples. Enormous learning experiences on cultural identity, land rights and citizenship are gathered in these processes of redressing historical wrongs. Today cases are heard in courts and out of courts relating to abuse in Indian Residential Schools, loss of culture and alienation of the Aboriginals from their environment. Land Rights Treaties are reviewed and re-negotiated with great concern and details. In the final analysis what is achieved is restoration of social justice and this adds to a clearer articulation and statement on Canadian citizenship and the practice of the Constitution and Canadian Human Rights Charter.

The on-going procedures and documentation make a natural link to earlier Canadian historical documents since the coming of the European pioneers. There are important treaties and legal documentation testifying to conferences over land and resources between Aboriginals and the first settlers and colonizers. Documents and conferences remembered in collective memories need greater public exposure and closeness to shed more light on concerns over cultural identity, justice and citizenship. Healing ceremonies are publicly conducted. The large public Sweat House will be opened in Winnipeg this year. Observances of healing processes towards correcting and learning from the past have released a tremendous amount of well researched knowledge that is a resource for not only Canada but the world at large where there are indigenous peoples in the forests, mountains, deserts and grasslands who share parallel experiences of colonialism and governance lacking in democracy and concern for minority wellbeing. The Canadian experience in rectifying an injustice such as the ratification process of the Nisga'a treaty in B.C. is a world precedent equal to only the Waitangi Case (New Zealand) in Human Rights and justice that is useful to regions where injustices against indigenous peoples committed due to colonial policies as well as post-colonial disregard of their presence.

Eminent personalities and the State

There have also been eminent personalities in Canadian history who are known internationally as peacemakers. One such a personality is Lester Bowles Pearson who received the Nobel Prize for Peace. In keeping with this tradition Canadian statesmen and women today are involved as mediators in helping nations in Asia, Middle East and Africa to end violence and find peaceful solutions to conflicts. These civil servants represent a living Canadian heritage at sites of long standing wars abroad. Canadian officials are known to develop good relations on both sides of the divide so as to be able to play a bridging role. This has been the case in parts of Africa and the Middle East where Canadian diplomats are working with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. However the State's involvement in conflict resolution in the international area is little known to the public at home. The connecting link would be an access through public displays of

material from Canadian past and present towards world peace that would gain popular support for foreign policy. For example today the Canadian government generally takes a no-war position as a peace nation as it was recently seen in the war in Iraq. The National Peacekeeping Monument in Ottawa, constructed in 1992, celebrates Canada's prominent and pioneering role in the United Nations peacekeeping operations in the 1980s when there was little participation on the ground from other nations in the UN peacekeeping efforts. In 1988 the UN received the Nobel Peace Prize. For many years Canada has offered asylum to those persecuted because of their opinions and freedom of expression. The impressive white marble Reparation Monument to the Victims of Genocide in Montreal that was erected on the 83rd anniversary of the Armenian genocide in 1912 is a statement on Canada's stand on violence due to racial, religious and ethnic differences and acceptance of refugees of such violence. In 1972 Canada accepted 7000 Asian African refugees who comprised a minority group in Uganda. Two of the major government development agencies in Ottawa namely, Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and IDRC, support peace and conflict resolution programmes in developing countries. These state agencies reflect Canada's foreign policy. This aspect of Canada's history and policies need greater national visibility for citizens to be better informed and understand Canada's role in sustaining peace abroad while also strengthening plural cultures of dialogue; integration and peace at home.

Spiritual communities

At another level there are Canadian communities of many faith cultures (e.g. Mennonites, Dukhobors, Bahai, Jains, Buddhists and Quakers) who have histories of community engagement in spreading the message of non-violence. These communities are currently involved in community-to-community work for peace in Canada as well as in parts of Africa, the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. Their role in finding solutions through negotiations and dialogues at home and globally is well recognized internationally and bodies such as the UN have given them office spaces at their headquarters to increase their own capacities for peaceful ways of ending disputes. These Canadian communities are a credit to the nation's heritage of peace. They have developed extensive networks of committed individuals and groups engaged in building peace from the remote tribal lands of the Himalayas to the highlands of the Philippines and cities of South Africa, the Middle East and South America. The peace theme runs through their development projects which are supported by community resources for better security as well as health, agriculture, relief, small-scale business training and fair trade.

Recent immigrants to Canada such as Tibetans who practice non-violence as principle of their daily life brace the peace mosaic of Canada. Immigrants bring diverse heritages of peace as well as civic and community values from Europe, Africa, Asia and South America to Canada but they are often not linked at the level of sharing cross-cultural practices that would enhance Canadian integration, citizenship and ethics. Peace Museums help to bond and appreciate shared values and responsibilities of societies whose origins are as diverse as different languages they speak. Their family and community histories receive better understanding and appreciation

through documentation and preservation of memories and oral testimony that they bring along with them in form of family albums, scared literature, family stories, ethnic clothing and artefacts that add importance to the ethos of a wider pluralist Canadian citizenry. Peace Museums in European and Asian countries have played this role of connecting communities to communities who work on mediation, dialogue, justice and peace.

The Third World Diaspora in Canada

There is a large Third World Diaspora of immigrants to whom Canada is home. The Diaspora that maintains its cultural identity and often dual citizenships holds approaches for world peace. The nucleus for this is seen in the initiatives taken by the diasporic communities with other Canadians (e.g. Canadian Sudan Civil Society Peace Building Initiative, Friends of Burma, North-South Institute, Solidarity Committee for Ethiopian Political Prisoners-Canada). Historically the Third World Diaspora in capitals of imperial Europe played a significant role in shaping nationalism and freedom from colonial rule. Leopold Senghor, the writer-politician of Senegal who had a strong influence in fashioning African esteem emerged from it. Jomo Kenyatta and Kenneth Kaunda like Gamel Nasser and Kwame Nkrumah were able to articulate freedom from racism and colonialism in England.

Diasporic cultures maintain the characteristic nostalgia of being uprooted and becoming a vacuum allowing empty spaces for transgressing into other uprooted global Diaspora cultures of the old empires and new revolutions and dictatorships. This Diaspora nurtures multicultural

Canadian intellectuals, artists and a civil society where education and citizenship foster values for peace and justice in democratic and protected structures of the provincial and federal laws.

Immigrants of colour have been arriving in Canada in steady flows of asylum seekers and refugees since the time of the wars of American independence when black slaves began to come to Canada looking for sanctuary, hope and work. The B.C. Punjabi Sikh community arrived more than a century ago and have had to maintain consistent claim for equal civil rights as other citizens. In August 2003 the hundred year old Sikh gurudwara in Abbotsford, BC was proclaimed a national heritage site of Canada. The proclamation reflects on Canada's acknowledgment of the Sikh community's struggle for civil rights and in that is contained a symbolic statement on the diversity of religions and cultures that add value to an equal and just society. For decades the Government of Canada and Japanese Canadians who were treated unjustly during the last World War, were engaged in dialogue of reconciliation and justice. Later the Government apologized for unfair treatment of Japanese Canadians and paid compensation.

In 20th century there came asylum seekers who were opposed to colonialism, wars and communism from many countries of Eastern Europe, Russia and Asia. They also came as refugees from ethnic conflicts and many represented voices of democracy against unjust rules

of military and dictatorships at home. This is the mettle of the Diaspora in Canada that connects to the continents of Africa, Europe, Asia and South America in its spirit and strength for democratic governance and just societies. In fact the Third World Diaspora in Canada today represents the movement for change for world peace and justice, a potential that has yet to be networked and manifested.

Canadian Community Museums

The nearest reference to well-organized collections of immigrants' material culture is found in community museums of Canada. The Dukhobors who run a beautiful community museum that displays among other things, their history and principles of non-violence, are said to have received support of Leo Tolstoy around 1900. There are Mennonite Museums in the prairies that record and display a people's history of escapes, exiles, persecutions, travels and settlements in the new land in hope of peace. They demonstrate alternatives to war like negotiation and joint community efforts for local welfare. There are other independent organizations such Project Ploughshares that have a long history of peace building through exhibiting objects. Emanating from these social values, many young Canadian volunteers travel to different parts of the world sharing their rural provincial experiences with other cultures and also simultaneously learning from and expanding their unique heritage at home with richness of human values gleaned from different cultural contexts abroad. It is on this growing foundation of Canadian life and practice of enlarging ethics of humanity that a wider national culture of peace can be realized out of but also beyond enclosures of family and small community knowledge bases. Peace Museums in Germany, Japan, Spain and multi-ethnic Africa as in other parts of the world have helped to bring together hitherto unknown and certainly unconnected living peace traditions of a diverse national population.

Canadian advantage

Canada as a peace nation has several other advantages. For example Canada recognizes unique peace events annually. One such an event occurs on the 4th of July every year as the day of planting of the peace tree in Ottawa by Guatemalan writer, José Recinos. Such events are made possible by peace groups and organizations, which need a greater national acknowledgement. In Canada there are many peace organizations comprising a broader civil society work for peace. The Canadian Alliance for Peace and the Peace Brigade International Canada (nominated for the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize) are two of the many others. J.R.Bennett's remarkable directory of peace organizations, programmes, museums and monuments in North America (London:2001) lists Canadian 160 entries. Also needing national recognition are peace educators of Canada. Not many know that Canada is today one of the frontline countries for advancement of Peace Education. Linda Covit's Caesura memorial in Montreal stands on 12,700 war toys given by Canadian children to be buried as an act of their objection to violence and expenditure on the military. There is an active association of peace educators of Canada that is one of the best organized and committed to teaching peace to younger generations. Such

efforts of citizens to keep peace traditions alive by teaching them and keeping the spirit going need national acclaim and support.

Far back into history we find records of peace and reconciliation customs of Inuit and First Nations which manifest in their rituals, environmental knowledge and spirituality. They are a testimony to the character and spirit of the land and its history, culture and values of relationship building and hospitality that were first shaped by working the land and creating communities who hosted the first European pioneers. The collective peace heritage of Canada comprising ancient knowledge of Aborigines, and that of earlier and later immigrants embody a wealth of wisdom learned from life experiences of families and individuals who provide a natural base to build uniquely Canadian Peace and Justice Museums. In all it will bear witness to the country's image in affirmation of its identity as a peace nation striving for social justice at community levels first.

Conclusion

The Community Peace and Justice Museums of Canada will draw from the heritages of cultural and spiritual diversities that this land nurtures as a montage of multi-ethnic and multi-faith nation founded on hospitality that was offered by the First Nations and Inuit people which is celebrated today at Thanksgiving every year. It will give visibility and understanding of culture of peace and social justice in Canada today and its historical evolution through displays of material culture and environmental symbols telling stories of beliefs that brought varied communities to this land of natural beauty. It will strengthen family and community based humanistic learning enhancing Canadian civic values and sense of citizenship.

The museums will be resource centres supporting research and civic education for the provincial and national curricula as well as activities for social justice and non violence at home and abroad. There will be places of creating awareness where communities will be encouraged to participate and commemorate their collective memories of how peace and justice was desired in their first homelands in spite of violence of religious intolerance, wars, poverty and persecutions that many tried to escape from. This is the story of the great Canadian migration over the last centuries. Their histories will be witnessed as histories of families in pursuit of peace and coming to Canada to build a country that accepts dual citizenships and multiple cultures into its variety of national life styles. Today there are a few universities and numerous Canadian civil society organizations engaged in research and activities to help sustain non-violent approaches to resolution of conflicts in different parts of the world. Community based Peace and Justice Museums of Canada will be guided by values held important by manifold perspectives from pioneer and recent culturally plural immigrant experiences that rest on ancient spirituality of the First Nations, Metis and Inuit people who respect life and mother earth symbolised by care of her sacred waters, mountains, forests and all life.

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Website references:

Peace Directory of Canada: [http://www.acp-cpa.ca/peacedirect\(E\).htm](http://www.acp-cpa.ca/peacedirect(E).htm)
 Canadian Peace Alliance: <http://www.acp-cpa.ca/CPAmainEnglish.htm>