

The Ypres Manifesto on Business for Peace

“First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win”(Mahatma Gandhi)

In commemoration of the Great War of 1914-1918, we gather together in Ypres, April 10 to 12, 2014, as an international group yearning for Peace and coming from more than ten different countries. In the war trenches of Ypres, thousands of young people lost their lives, their innocence and dreams. It does not suffice to hold a moment of silence to respectfully remember those who perished. No, commemorating the Great War demands a brutally honest and open reflection upon what we must do today in order to prevent the next war, the next slaughter. It is our duty to resurrect the lost dreams of a sacrificed generation and to transform their heroism in warfare into heroism for peace.

1. We acknowledge that today’s business leaders are in a unique position to influence what happens in society for years to come. With this power comes monumental responsibility. They can choose to ignore this responsibility, and thereby exacerbate problems such as economic inequality, environmental degradation and social depravation, but this will compromise their ability to do business in the long run. Good business needs a peaceful and just world in which to operate and prosper. At the same time, we recognize that businesses – directly or indirectly – are partly involved in the arms race. But just as threatening is the culture of aggression that is found in some basic motivations of business such as economic greed, hyper competition and a megalomaniac drive always for more and bigger profits and acquisitions.

2. As a general statement we claim that despite recurrent war scenarios, peace is a realistic aim that can and has to be realized through enlightened and sustained human commitment. Yet, we are aware that this optimistic belief lacks credibility if it is not coupled with two conditions. First, peace commitment requires the courage to face and unveil the hidden motivations of war embedded in our present way of life as reflected in our economic, social and political mindset. Such critical alertness will allow us to avoid the chasm between words and deeds. Second, peace building demands an ethic of responsibility for the whole of humanity and all of creation. Without an overlapping and intrinsic common good perspective, we will produce diversity without unity and increase the risk of war.

3. If we change our mindset, we will change the realities of war and peace. War and peace are at their very core, ways of thinking. We have to train ourselves to discern the spirit of exclusion. It is a spirit that leads to war and is quite distinct from the spirit of inclusion that fosters peace. Both spirits are operative in our organizations as psychological and epistemological mechanisms. We should stop the spirit of thinking *against*: we against them, or they against us, the good against the bad, the victims against the perpetrators, the winners against the losers. By perceiving the other as a threat, we end up in diabolizing the other as an enemy. Instead of thinking against, we should think *beyond*. Peace deconstructs the enemy-fixation and sees the 'beyond' in every person and in every situation. Peace is not a utopian condition without conflict or divergence. It is a spiritual method to overcome blocked oppositions of values and interests. Following E.F. Schumacher in his *Guide for the Perplexed*, we regard peace thinking as an underdeveloped source of creativity and problem solving in society. We plead it be given a more prominent place in education and leadership training.

4. The human cost of conflict-based models of leadership is immense. Even so given the lack of trust, many people in business and politics prefer this model. As a consequence we are trapped by the pitfalls of illusory peace. We reduce peace to a temporary armistice based on fear and deterrence or to an opportunistic strategy for conquering markets. Such a peace is illusory for it is merely the absence of conflict draped over a culture of aggression. A conflict-based model of leadership is not appropriate to overcome the challenges of our time. It doesn't generate the necessary trust. It doesn't develop the potential of global interconnectedness. It doesn't care about the fragility of our planet. It excludes too many people from participating in the benefits of social welfare. We believe that a new type of leadership will emerge and is already emerging. It is not based on the conventional reasoning of maximization of power, profit or output but on the quality of human relations, the search for meaning in work and the integration of our particular interests into a common good perspective.

5. We should invent new models of economic development based on inclusive thinking. The postwar industrial models of linear economic growth combined with national policies of redistributive justice and social security didn't reach that level of inclusiveness. They suffered both from national protectionism and lack of connection to the natural world. Neither does the model of hyper competitive globalization strengthened by national policies of economic self-interest reach the needed level of inclusiveness. At this moment we don't have

a sustainable model of peace-based economic development. We have to start it on the place where we are working and living, but also in formulating better global institutions which reward inclusiveness and diversity with unity.

6. *The basic principles* for a global model of development have been formulated by many international, social and religious organizations. They contain respect for human rights, intercultural respect, interreligious dialogue, responsibility for future generations, prioritization of the common good, sustainability, frugality, fair prices and fair wages, global redistributive justice, stakeholder democracy, meaning in work. These and other principles formulate social and ecological limits to an ego-centric and profit-driven practice of economic growth. We strongly acknowledge the validity of these principles. But *Business for Peace* needs a more existential and personal motivation to overcome free riding arguments, indifferentism and cynicism. In his famous postwar *General Theory*, John M. Keynes referred to 'animal spirits' as the basic drivers of change in business and economics. 'Animal spirits' was a reference to the panoply of shadowy impulses, fears, hopes, and sheer greed, lurking in the human heart and psychic. Such 'animal spirits' may well be the drivers of business but they cannot drive us to peace. Instead we must cultivate 'our higher human spirits'. They will check the shadowy aspects of the human condition. They will disclose unexpected ways for peace-building. Let us use the untapped spiritual potential of the human mind in economic and social life.

7. *As a sign of commitment*, we will continue our Ypres Dialogue during the period 2014-2018. We will use the website *Business for Peace* as a shared platform to communicate new ideas and practices for peace-based leadership and development. Our effort must be seen as but a modest step within a worldwide movement to prevent war and sustain peace.

European SPES forum (Luk Bouckaert & Laszlo Zsolnai)
Global Compact Network Belgium (Iris Van der Veken)
Globalisation for the Common Good Initiative (Kamran Mofid)
Optimists without Borders (Luc Simonet)
Philosophie & Management (Laurent Ledoux)
The European Baha'I Business Forum (Daniel Truran)
VKW het Ondernemersplatform (Caroline Ven)

CO-ORGANISERS OF THE BUSINESS FOR PEACE CONFERENCE