



Science for Peace

June 23, 2021

President's Column



Dear Members,

We have two important matters to discuss at the Annual General Meeting on June 29th, beginning at 7 pm. The board is hoping that all members will tune in to this Zoom meeting.

The first matter is a set of tributes to four of our outstanding members: Phyllis Creighton, Chandler Davis, Margrit Eichler and Derek Paul. Of course, we have many outstanding members, many of whom have stood loyally with Science for Peace for decades. Yet I think we probably all agree that these four should be in the first round of recognition. Their achievements are many. We are experimenting with a rather high-tech presentation, so let's hope it all turns out as planned! Six stalwart members, together with our coordinator Melisa Kuc, have participated in bringing this project to fruition. You will learn who at the AGM. Please refer to Upcoming Events below for more details.

The second matter concerns the governance of Science for Peace. First, the board has approved the hiring of a national coordinator this summer, who will work 25-30 hours per week. The digital age has not made life easier for the executive, just the opposite. It has imposed new burdens by way of email messages, social media and website. If we want to move to the next level of effectiveness, we need to have someone who can run the routine business of the organization without constant direction.

In addition, we in the executive and board believe we need to involve the board more directly in the governance of SfP. When the board comprised more than 40 directors, it was too unwieldy to play more than a formal role. But now we have a trimmed-down board of only 20 members, seven of whom

are on the executive. It is now quite feasible for the board to be more directly involved in decision-making. Why not draw more on the remarkable talent on our board? We'll work out the details through experience. Perhaps to begin, the board might meet every second month, with the executive meeting alone in the alternate months.

In sum, this is the month in which we celebrate our past milestones and look forward to a revamped and more effective Science for Peace. See you on the 29th!

Richard Sandbrook
Professor Emeritus of Political Science
University of Toronto

Upcoming



SCIENCE FOR PEACE

Annual General Meeting with Special event

Tuesday, June 29 7 PM ET

7:00 — 7:30: Tributes to Phyllis Creighton, Chandler Davis, Margrit Eichler, and Derek Paul

7:30 — 8:30: AGM business

Please visit www.scienceforpeace.ca for zoom link

Recent Activities

**BOOK LAUNCH WITH AUTHOR &
ACTIVIST RAY ACHESON**

@ACHESONRAY

Release 2021

Thursday, May 27, 2021
at 7pm ET via Zoom,
Register at: vowpeace.org

In commemoration of the International Women's
Day for Peace and Disarmament

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Full Recording

Focus on Members: Vladimir Zhagora



Former Senior Political Affairs Officer, Department of Political Affairs, United Nations Headquarters, New York City

My involvement in the activities of Science for Peace is slightly over three years long. During this brief period, I developed an allegiance to its values and teleology. Hence, my desire to share a couple of thoughts in an effort to strengthen its objectives and set out its goals in accordance with the prevailing priorities in the field of conflict prevention and peaceful settlement of crises.

For over two decades of my career with the United Nations I have been involved in a dozen mediations in African conflicts. What have I learned about promoting peace in fragile states and civil conflicts? I will offer a few observations. On a continental level, Africa faces many new challenges. Some of them are internally driven, and others derived from external, global factors, such as violent extremism, intolerant populist agendas, and nowadays - a COVID-19 pandemic. Against this broadly diverse background of the causes of conflict in Africa, it is appropriate to stress the primacy of the political. It is not an exaggeration to state that all the responses of the parties engaged in the conflict prevention and conflict resolution are ultimately political, both in substance and in purpose.

True as it may be in Africa, this observation is equally pertinent to the challenges of conflict prevention and conflict settlement worldwide. Settlement of conflicts, in particular, by resorting to military enforcement operations, must not jeopardize peace itself, or violate norms of international law. Primacy of the political serves a critically important task of ensuring ownership of the peace processes by the parties to the conflict, whose role in the settlement and the implementation of the negotiated agreement is paramount.

In 2015-2016, I participated in an effort by the World Peace Foundation, in

cooperation with the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University, to chart an agenda for peace in Africa. It was a group exercise focused on how the African Union can implement its norms and use its instruments to prevent and resolve armed conflicts. The emphasis was laid on the peacekeeping operations. In the final report published in 2016 three main dimensions of the “primacy of the political” were analyzed: (a) the implementation of the norms and principles; (b) African ownership of the goals and strategies for peace and security; (c) emphasis on the conflict prevention and political settlements. In the context of peace support operations (PSO) this approach would ensure that a PSO is designed and implemented in accordance with the stated political objectives, with financing considerations being ancillary to mission objectives. There is every reason to believe that these principles, as well as methodology of conflict resolution based on them, are applicable in conflict resolution worldwide.

A stronger emphasis on conflict prevention, which has been a stated principle of the African Union, is inextricably linked with the challenge of peacebuilding. In my experience, peacebuilding under particularly dire and persistent circumstances, such as in Somalia, or South Sudan experience, demands exceptional access to the highest levels of political decision-making. To achieve this goal, the African Union, in cooperation with the United Nations and such regional organizations as LAS, IGAD, ICGLR, SADC, often practices “high-level panels”, or “panels of the wise”. The experience of conflict resolution in the DRC, Kenya, Zimbabwe shows that this political tool ensures credibility and discretion in preventive action. It also significantly contributes to the implementation of the agreed political solutions.

However, the most challenging task of peacebuilding is the cluster of issues dealing with post-conflict reconstruction and development. By now, there is an extensive volume of failures and successes in addressing them. It is obvious now that no lasting peace could be achieved, regardless of the “beauty” of a peace deal, unless priority is given to Security Sector Reform and Disarmament, Demobilization and Re-integration. In theory, there is sufficient clarity on what needs to be done to achieve the goals of the SSR and the DDR. In practice, every African country lived through its own handicap of trials, errors and failures in the efforts to implement them.

In my experience, the entire range of the related steps leading to the successful fulfillment of the SSR and the DDR obligations, is heavily dependent on the commitment of the principal political players on all sides. It is costly to the national states and their donors. It is psychologically and socially painful to former combatants and their commanders. And it takes years of focused, often forceful, efforts by the ruling elites to implement them. Very few African nations have successfully implemented their SSR/DDR programs and reforms. But even those which did it, like Ethiopia in 1990s, have not been guaranteed peace and stability in the long run.

Given the “mission statement” of the SfP, I think that focusing on the issues of conflict prevention, conflict resolution and peacebuilding should be one of its centerpiece responsibilities. Promoting discussions on these subjects in a scholarly setting, in a style and format appealing to a broader audience, may offer us new opportunities in making the SfP’s efforts known to a more representative segment of the population. SfP has already established its presence in the social media. I believe this presence can and should be expanded, by making use of regular, if not systematic, participation in popular talk shows and chats on YouTube, Instagram, Zoom and whatever next information exchange vehicle is going to appear in the cyberspace.

What strikes me as an especially important strength of the SfP are the messages of peace, cooperation, conflict prevention nuclear disarmament and global environment protection. Each of them is appealing to the population at large, and the SfP must continue to promote these messages as comprehensively and efficiently as possible.

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