On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the United Nations, Robert Muller and I wrote a book, *Safe Passage Into the Twenty-first Century*, in which we discussed the UN’s quest for peace, equality, justice and development. We gave a framework for a global system to abolish war and establish a democratic United Nations, a global justice system, and a global human development system. This ambitious agenda requires a transformation in thinking to move the world from the old culture of war to a new culture of peace.

The University for Peace is developing that agenda of education for nonviolence, social inclusion and the rule of law to overcome cycles of conflict and violence. It was named in the historic Declaration on the Right to Peace, adopted in 2016 at the UN General Assembly, and encouraged to "contribute to the great universal task of educating for peace by engaging in teaching, research, post-graduate training and dissemination of knowledge."

The world needs to know more about the Declaration on the Right to Peace. The idea of a culture of peace to overcome the culture of war was first taken up in 1989. UNESCO, under Federico Mayor, began to formulate a culture of peace as a set of ethical and aesthetic values, habits and customs, attitudes and ways of life that express respect for the dignity and human rights of individuals. The Norwegian Centre for Human Rights produced a document outlining peace as a human right, peace as a duty, and the development of peace through programs promoting a culture of peace.

At UNESCO’s general conference in 1997, many European countries attacked or expressed reservations about the right to peace. Countries from the South accused the North of wanting to protect their arms industries. During the next two years, the debate
shifted to a culture of peace which resulted in the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, adopted by the General Assembly in 1999. It set out a path for ending violence through education, dialogue and cooperation, commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts, promotion of the right to development, equal rights, and freedom of expression, opinion and information.

The often unsung movement which rejects war is still overshadowed by the coverage the media gives to intra-state wars and other forms of strife. The movement to a culture of peace, however "soft" it may appear on the surface could be the real power of the 21st century. The momentum of history, buttressed by new life-enhancing technologies, is on the side of the culture of peace.

Is it possible at this moment in history to turn the culture of peace into the right to peace? Does it follow that, because all human rights are universal, indivisible, interrelated, interdependent and mutually reinforcing, all people are entitled to the right to peace in order to enjoy their inherent human rights?

In 2012, the UN Human Rights Council began a study of a declaration stating that all individuals have the right to live in peace so that they can fully develop their physical, intellectual, moral and spiritual capacities without the threat of violence. Stark divisions between different countries' perspectives inevitably emerged, however.

Just as it was necessary to go beyond the UN Charter in writing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the proponents of the right to peace claim it is now necessary to wrap the issues of peace and security, development and human rights into a single framework called "the right to peace." Many states find this appealing because it reflects a holistic approach to peace. They take the view that without peace, it is not possible to realize all human rights, including the right to development. Some Western countries still vigorously reject this idea, holding the view that there is no legal basis for peace in international law and that it is impossible to find a common definition of peace grounded on human rights.

The Human Rights Council struggled to find consensus on the declaration, settling on, "Everyone has the right to enjoy peace such that all human rights are promoted and protected and development is fully realized." The resolution was adopted first by the Human Rights Council, and then the General Assembly in 2016, although with notable votes against (such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Germany, France, and Spain). The resolution carried because of support in Latin America, Africa and Asia.

The opponents of a Declaration on the Right to Peace doubtless fear that it will pave the way for a future comprehensive law against warfare. As a politician and activist, my immediate concern is building public opinion for an extension of the present human rights agenda to include the primary issue of peace.
The development of public opinion in opposing war is a necessary basis for legal prohibition of warfare. Thus the Declaration has political value in laying the basis for a more secure world. Fighting over the legality of the document at this stage may derail long-range efforts needed to strengthen international law. In short, the new Declaration on the Right to Peace, non-binding as it is, can act as a catalyst in spurring the development of the peace agenda.

Achieving a Right to Peace depends on a rules-based order. But that order seems to be giving way today to a new world of deep disarray. Global warming is heading to massive catastrophe. A new nuclear arms race is starting. Migrants and refugees are piling up by the millions. The International Criminal Court, the Iran Agreement, and the Paris Accords are being undermined. Although the "death of multilateralism" has been greatly exaggerated, it is unquestionably being attacked by forces that stoke greed and fear in the political and economic systems.

In this atmosphere, the culture of peace, let alone the right to peace, appears to be suffocating. But what cannot be suffocated is the conscience of humanity. A new global conscience is awakening humanity and leading us to new recognition of the implacable values of the common good. I fully support the expression of this conscience outlined by Pope Francis earlier this year, when he called for work on the primacy of justice and law, defence of the vulnerable, working to build bridges, and "rethinking our common destiny."

The wave of the future is the struggle for an elementary social justice, a goal framed by the Sustainable Development Goals. Millions of people, in a vast array of civil society organizations, are working daily in a myriad of ways to make the world a better place, especially for the vulnerable. This unsung activity is firming up a culture of peace and laying the groundwork for acceptance of the right to peace, and this will have a greater long-range effect on humanity than the eruptions now taking place. Focusing on what the world has already achieved in the human security agenda gives us a solid foundation to hope for even more in the years ahead.