



*"First they ignore you, then they laugh at you, then they fight you, then you win"*  
(Mahatma Gandhi)

## **The Ypres Manifesto on Business for Peace**

*April 10-12, 2014*

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 transform the lost dreams of a sacrificed generation into a commitment 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 deprivation, though 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. And conversely: peace thrives in a healthy economic environment. 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 motivations of business such as economic greed 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 the courage to face the hidden motivations of war embedded in our economic, social and political mindset. Such critical alertness will allow us to avoid the chasm between words and deeds. But this does not suffice. Peace-building demands an ethic of

responsibility for the whole of humanity and all of creation. Without an overlapping common good perspective, self-interest will prevail and increase the risk of war.

**3. If we change our mindset**, we will change reality. War and peace are at their very core, ways of thinking. 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 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. Why do we not intensify the use of this underdeveloped source of creativity and problem solving? We plead it be given a more prominent place in education and leadership training.

**4. The human cost of conflict-driven models of leadership** is immense. Even so given the lack of trust, many people in business and politics settle for this model. We reduce peace to a temporary armistice based on fear and deterrence, or to a means for conquering markets. Such a peace is illusory for it is merely the absence of conflict draped over a culture of aggression. A conflict-driven 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 particular interests into a common good perspective.

**5. We should invent** new models of economic development. The postwar industrial models of linear economic growth combined with national policies of redistributive justice and social security suffer 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, democratic decision-making and meaning in work. 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. The economist John M. Keynes referred to 'animal spirits' as the basic drivers of change in business. Yet such 'animal spirits' may change economics but they cannot drive us to peace unless we integrate them into the higher level of 'human spirits' that cultivate a deep sense of co-responsibility and co-creativity. Experiments with new types of spiritual and ethical training of future entrepreneurs and leaders are needed to achieve this transformation.

**7. As a sign of commitment**, we will continue the Ypres Dialogue for peace during the period 2014-2018. We will use the website *Business for Peace* as a shared platform to communicate new ideas and practices. 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, Hendrik Opdebeeck & Laszlo Zsolnai)*  
*Belgian Red Cross - Flanders (Christ'I Joris)*  
*ebbf - mindful people meaningful work (Daniel Truran)*  
*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)*  
*VKW het Ondernemersplatform (Caroline Ven)*

*CO-ORGANISERS OF THE BUSINESS FOR PEACE CONFERENCE*  
*YPRES, APRIL 10-12, 2014*