

## Introduction to the World Center for Peace, Liberties and Human Rights

**To introduce the World Center for Peace, Liberties and Human Rights, please let me go back some years.**

In 1988, the Former United Nations Secretary, Mr. Javier PEREZ DE CUELLAR launched the project of the World Center for Peace, Liberties and Human Rights in Verdun. Fruit of a common will, shared by the City of Verdun, the Department of Meuse, the Region Lorraine and the State of France, the World Center for Peace, Liberties and Human Rights had to become a new place for Memory and History, in order to be a place where we work about Peace and international relationships. [Photo 1 – Photo 2](#)

The choice of Verdun as the location goes back to the end of the 1980's. [Photo 03](#)

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of September 1984, the French President François MITTERRAND and the German Chancellor Helmut KOHL were together, hand by hand, on the battlefield of Verdun. This picture, known around the world as a sign of reconciliation and friendship, belongs to Verdun's History. These two leaders have chosen to strengthen the European Union in order to preserve the balance in Europe. It was not the choice to forget the tragical History and Memory between France and Germany, but the will to build a new future.

This choice – surpassing the past - was not easy, because the Battle of Verdun is probably one of the most terrific battles between Germany and France. In 300 days, 300 000 soldiers died, each square of the battle field received one ton of shells, and gases were used... One hundred years later, 120 000 unknown - French and German - soldiers are still in the ground. [photo 4](#)

After World War One (*WW1*), Verdun became a myth and a part of the French national Memory. The battle field has been preserved as a memory place. Because 85% of French soldiers fought in Verdun during the battle, almost all of the French families have Veterans who have been in Verdun.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the myth of Verdun has grown : Each anniversary was an opportunity to develop Memory. Every ten years, the French President is present. In 1966, the French President Charles de GAULLE named Verdun a ***“Capital of Peace”***. Every year, hundreds of thousands of tourists and students come to Verdun in order to discover the battle field and the major places of Memory. Every year, more than 80 ceremonies are organized to commemorate the different places of the fights during the battle of Verdun.

For these tourists and students, the message of veterans ***“Never again”*** is not enough. They have to understand how wars are emerging, how wars are ending, the different ways to reduce crises and Peace processes. They have to understand the changes in the society and in the world. For these visitors and goals, the World Center for Peace has been created and is open since 1994.

The World Center for Peace is not a Museum, but a place where you can discover new subjects every year, a place where discussions and meetings are possible, for example with international leaders, diplomatic actors, artists...

To help these programs, the City of Verdun allows the World Center for Peace to use the prestigious Bishop's Palace with more than 2000 m<sup>2</sup> for exhibitions and several conference halls to host until 300 persons.

**So, the World Center for Peace, Liberties and Human Rights is installed in a wonderful building, on an historical place and has a prestigious name.**

**Is that enough to be successful ?**

**No, it is not enough. In my experience, the success depends on many different factors. Let's explore those factors.**

### **The success of a Museum for Peace depends of many factors :**

#### **1 - The place for Peace, Memory and History in the society :**

In times of war, crisis or just after a conflict, the interest for Peace is globally very important in the society.

For example, in 2014, my conference in Kaboul about WW1 and French German relationships today was full of people, even if the danger of terrorist attacks was everywhere.

In 2017, in Bogota, the **"16<sup>th</sup> World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates"** has attracted more than 25 000 people each day during 4 days, even when the security protection was on the highest level.

This interest in these events is an evidence of the will of the population to find a solution to the civilian war and develop Peace processes.

In Europe, Peace has become normal since the Second World War (WW2), and even more since 1989 and the end of the Cold War. Every year it seems harder to mobilize people to stand up for Peace and Human Rights.

The interest for History, Peace, conflicts, crises, and any historical event is not the same through the years. First, just after the event, the interest is on the highest level for the society, victims and witnesses.

In France, we make a division between Memory and History. The interest of society for Peace and conflicts changes throughout these 2 main periods.

The period of Memory describes the time where there are still veterans and witnesses alive. Many families want to discover the reality of the conflict of their parents. For example, in Verdun, the battle field and the cemeteries are Memorial places to visit, needed to understand this period and to pay tribute to relatives.

After the death of all veterans and witnesses, Memory becomes History. Commemorations are needed to transmit the past.

These two periods are very different in the way how to present and commemorate the historical event.

## **2 - The sense of war in the country :**

Another important factor that changes the populations view on war and Peace is the outcome of the conflict. In this context, the examples of WW1 and WW2 are interesting to discover.

In France, WW1 has been celebrated as a victory with the return of the region Alsace Lorraine to France. For Germans, WW1 is a defeat. The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 was a humiliation for Germany. But no battle and no destruction were present on the ground of Germany. Today, the only German artefacts of WW1 are often Cemeteries outside the country.

WW2 was different : Most of the majors cities in Germany were bombed. The inhuman atrocities by the Nazis have created a strong feeling of responsibility. Even if the war was a defeat, which normally makes societies wanting to forget the war, Germany has developed a very strong memorial culture concerning the WW2 and the genocide until today.

During the centenary of WW1, the presence in the media of this event was extreme in France. Thousands of books were published. Each French family was invited by the French government to participate at a massive action in personal archives. In all cities in France, educative actions were organized. Even the German President and the German Chancellor were present with the French President on several WW1 battlefields. But the impact of the centenary of the WW1 was totally different in the 2 countries.

## **3 . Witnesses and Veterans Associations**

Building Memory needs witnesses able to share and speak about their experiences.

Just after WW2, many witnesses from the camps of concentration were not ready to talk. It was difficult for the society to deal with the pas directly after the war, because they wanted to focus on the future. Since the 1970s, witnesses of WW2 are actively testifying and sharing their stories with people, especially young ones. Their testimonies are essential to transmit the real History.

In France, Veterans associations are dynamical. The influence that Veterans associations have in society decides the place for History in the public debate and the place in school programs. In Verdun, the Veterans are playing an important role in the commemorations.

#### **4 - The place of History in Education :**

What should be the place for History in the school programs. Depending on each country, this question is also important for a museum that works about Peace or Memory.

In 2019, elected politicians in our department (Meuse) have discovered that the battle of Verdun will not be anymore in the official French programs for education. All of these elected politicians protested because the economy of the territory depends on visitors of the historical sites. The French Minister of Education heard that and gave insurance that Verdun will not be forgotten.

Last week, the French Government has decided to create a European Institute which will work about the learning of History at school. This Institute will be under the authority of the Council of Europe. Alain LAMASSOURE, European Deputy in charge of this Institute, has announced that the main goals will be to ***“learn about History to preserve reconciliation”*** and ***“to have a solid learning of History in each European Country in order to protect young people and do not let them be manipulated”***.

In France, 104 major Museums talk about war, conflicts and Peace. Most of them are private and need tourists, visitors and students in order to stay alive.

In Germany, one category of memorial places is special : the concentration camps. All of them are free to visit. This is the result of the feeling of culpability for Nazis atrocities and also a political choice to let everybody understand what happens when nationalism takes power, and to understand this part of Germany's History to assure that it won't happen again.

#### **5 . The influence of new technologies, films and internet :**

Now, with special effects, war and fights are everywhere in a lot of video games or films, and sometimes with more reality than it is possible to create in any exhibition. When the Internet seems as a global library where you could immediately find answers about historical events, the exhibitions have to change in order to stay attractive.

Our center tries to attract visitors by choosing objects with authenticity. For example, to present the Cold War, we worked with the French Secret Service in order to present original spy gadgets and equipment.

#### **6 . Commemorations and official events :**

Official commemorations are essential to assure the society's interest on history.

With an incredible media coverage, the centenary of WW1 has given a desire to the French population to explore the past. In Verdun, and in all the memorial and historical places, the number of visitors increased (*for example, here in Verdun the number doubled*). But the

interest of the visitors was focused on the battles and on the soldiers, and not on the Peace process to end the war and build a new order in Europe.

When François HOLLANDE and Angela MERKEL were together on the battle field of Verdun - *it was the 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2016* - more than 300 journalists were present covering the ceremony live. Several million people have discovered Verdun during this ceremony watching their TVs. Some of them are the tourists and visitors we welcome since this event.

In all official commemorations, official speeches are used to talk about Memory, its place in the society and following steps.

## **7 . The interest of Political leaders :**

The success of each museum depends on the political will and support. Using History and the past of a city or region, a political leader, such as a mayor, can support the tourism activities and Museums.

In contrast, when the previous mayor of Verdun decided to privilege and support only the institutions dealing with the WW1, our Center was in serious difficulties.

## **8 . Objects and items to present Peace :**

It is very simple to present war : uniforms, pictures, weapons and battle field maps are numerous and easy to find. Creating an exhibition talking about war is very easy. But many people are waiting for something different, something about Peace. So the question is : how is it possible to present Peace ?

Peace processes are full of meetings, speeches and sometime official photos after any agreement. We have used different items inside our exhibitions : Press cartoons, posters, official speeches, medals, photos, films and art works...

The result was deceptive. Only a part of our visitors likes this items, and most of them prefer exhibitions with weapons and battles souvenirs... In the same time, the visitors were asking us why we have exhibitions about war in the World Center for Peace.

We have worked on these questions, trying to find new categories of items to present Peace and to attract people to visit our exhibitions.

The first idea was to collect all the pens used to sign Peace agreements.

Following this idea, we have asked international leaders to lend us official presents they offered each other. The result was a wonderful exhibition called ***"Peace Makers"*** in 2016. I will talk about it after.

**So, with so many differ factors, how could a Peace museum like the World Center for Peace work and be attractive for visitors ?**

I will try to answer this question by presenting our activities and our partnerships.

Before beginning this presentation around several examples, I deeply think that a Peace Museum has to follow the society and keep progressing its activities, in order to be a mirror of the questions inside the society, and perhaps a keeper for main Human values, such as Press Liberty, Democracy, Human Rights, and Diplomacy.

How do you be a keeper of values without being a sermonizer ? This question is very important in order to let visitors form their own opinion. For that, in every exhibition, we have to choose an historical point of view, without any political bias, and if possible prove the facts with original photos, testimonies, films, and of course objects.

To decide the program of the activities and exhibitions in the World Center for Peace, I usually look every year which commemorations and official anniversaries are coming up.

For example, 2019 is a very rich year with :

- the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the beginning of the Second World War
- the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization
- the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the first man on the moon
- the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the wall in Berlin (and the end of the cold war)
- the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Euro (European common currency)

and of course the European Elections in may 2019

This calendar has led us to develop a new exhibition called : ***“Funny Peace(s) : 1945 to 2019”***. It starts in 1938 in Munich, which was the last time for Europeans to choose their destiny independently.

Unfortunately, by choosing to give Czechoslovakia to Hitler, the Europeans didn't preserve Europe from War. After the Second World War, the World became different, separated into 2 blocks : the Soviet Union and the United States of America ; two different economical systems, two different ideologies.

That resulted in the Cold War with an arms race including nuclear bombs, a space race and spies.

During the Cold War, Europe began to build its union. At the end of the Cold War, Europe appears as a major international player. But the end of the Cold War was also the end of a world simple to understand, because new stakes appeared, such as terrorism, the war of technologies and information, a commercial war, an environment crisis and new international powers, such as China, Russia and India.

To develop this exhibition, we have used material from previous exhibitions and we worked with other museums to find original objects, and we have also used our collections.

**Let me present our extraordinary collections to You:**

It was unbelievable, but when I became Director in 2013, The World Center for Peace had no collection. It is clearly difficult to develop a collection with objects about Peace. Before I was Director, most of the exhibitions were bought to be presented in the World Center for Peace. Since several years, we are creating our exhibitions ourselves. In 2015, I asked myself two questions : how to present today's Peace processes and why different crises in the world are not becoming major crises. The way to answer these questions was to ask international leaders, such as François HOLLANDE, Angela MERKEL, Barack OBAMA, and the Pope, to lend us some official presents exchanged during their common work to reduce crises. And we were successful and received objects from 29 international leaders. These presents were presented in the exhibition "**Peace Makers**" where we explained many different crises. The great success of this exhibition, and the way those objects were used made it possible for us to have our own collections. Since 2017, the French Government trusted us with all the official presents given to the French Presidents GISCARD, SARKOZY, HOLLANDE and now Emmanuel MACRON. That includes more than 20 000 pieces from more than 160 countries. Many presents can be used to present diplomatic relationships.

Every year, we present one or two new exhibitions. With all exhibitions, we collect money from entrance fees. All our exhibitions are also a support for other events : conferences, testimonies or seminars. For example, a group from the High administration of the European Union comes every 3 months. They do workshops in our exhibitions, also about their ideas for Europe and the European Union. We are lucky to have many rooms at our disposal to organize conferences and workshops....

We do not only work in the Bishop's Palace of Verdun. We like to develop exhibitions and present them in other locations. For us, strange and unexpected places are the most profitable places to invite people to discuss with us. For example, going to a train station or a shopping center lets us meet people who are not normally going in museums.

For each activity, we are trying to establish partnerships with the media, the diplomatic corps, the French Institutions and Foreign Institutions or leaders.

For example, all our exhibitions are placed under the high patronage of the French President.

In 2015, for the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the United Nations, our building was the only one in France chosen by the United Nations to be lightened up in blue. At the same time, all around the world, more than 150 major buildings were turned in blue, such as the Corcovado in Brazil, the Empire State Building in New York and the Pyramids in Egypt.

In 2017, during the 16<sup>th</sup> World Summit of Nobel Peace Laureates, we presented an exhibition in Bogota. This international event was a wonderful time to discuss about the different processes for Peace. The European experience and the ability of France and Germany to develop a real friendship were subjects of the discussion.

Several months later, we presented an application to host in 2018 the Summit in Verdun, Reims and Strasbourg, the 3 main cities involved in the French and German relationships and

Europe. All the Laureates accepted this project, which would have been a possibility to defend European Values.

Mr. Juan Manuel SANTOS, Former President of Colombia and Laureate of the Nobel Prize for Peace even defended the project during his official dinner with the French President.

The event would have been a great opportunity for our center and a great support for Europe. Unfortunately, we did not find enough money to organize it. There were too many international events at the same time and the French President chose to organize a Peace Summit in Paris that worked with international leaders and international firms about the political difficulties in Europe.

We have solid partnerships with several international leaders, Institutions or Organizations. We try every day to develop and keep these partnerships, which is not always easy. In order to convince them, we have to be creative.

I will end this presentation talking about our major target of visitors which are young people. In our team, we have two History teachers. One part of their job is to create workshops and programs for young people and especially students. Another part of their job is to inform all the schools about our activities.

Every year we host one or two European volunteers to work with us. That allows us to have an international point of view.

We deeply believe in the power of partnerships and common programs to develop our activities and to help young people understand the world with all its challenges. Today, I can confirm our wish to develop programs with South Korea in order to organize youth exchanges. The reconciliation between France and Germany is not a universal model, but an example for people all over the world to believe in an other future. For example, the time for reconciliation between the North and South Korea is approaching. I would like to thank you very much for my invitation to this Forum in Jeju, and I am looking forward to continue the cooperation that started today.