

BEYOND THE ABSENCE OF WAR: TOWARDS AN INTEGRATIVE PLANETARY PHILOSOPHY OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

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Abstract

*This paper argues that the prevailing conception of peace as merely the absence of war is philosophically inadequate for addressing the complex realities of contemporary global insecurity. Despite advances in science, technology, and governance, societies continue to experience violent conflicts, structural injustice, psychological trauma, and ecological degradation, demonstrating that the cessation of armed conflict alone cannot guarantee genuine peaceful coexistence. Employing the **analytic and dialectical philosophical** methods, the paper critically examines dominant peace paradigms, develops a wholistic conception of peace, and proposes the **Integrative Planetary Peace Theory (IPPT)** as a comprehensive philosophical framework. It further draws on the **Principle of Ejikemeuwa (nonviolence)** as the ethical and methodological foundation for sustainable peace. The study finds that authentic peace is multidimensional, consisting of harmony with oneself, harmony with one's neighbours, and harmony with the environment. It contends that lasting peaceful coexistence can only be achieved through the integration of inner moral harmony, social justice, ecological balance, and principled nonviolence. Consequently, the paper concludes that peacebuilding should move beyond militarized and state-centric approaches to embrace moral education, inclusive governance, restorative justice, environmental stewardship, and a planetary ethic of interdependence. It recommends the adoption of the Integrative Planetary Peace Theory by policymakers, educators, peace practitioners, and global institutions as a viable philosophical framework for cultivating enduring peace and meaningful peaceful coexistence in an interconnected world.*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary global landscape presents a sobering paradox. While humanity has attained unprecedented scientific, technological, and economic advancement, global peace continues to deteriorate. According to the *Global Peace Index 2025*, the level of peacefulness has declined in most regions of the world, with more states experiencing internal conflict, displacement, and militarization than at any point since the mid-twentieth century (Institute for Economics & Peace [IEP], 2025). Protracted wars, geopolitical rivalries, economic inequalities, and environmental crises collectively threaten the prospects of peaceful coexistence.

In response to these realities, the United Nations General Assembly designated 28 January as the *International Day of Peaceful Coexistence*, reaffirming the global community's commitment to tolerance, inclusion, and solidarity across cultural, religious, and political divides (United Nations, 2025). Interestingly, the UN already has the *International Day of Peace* on 21 September, which focuses broadly on ending conflict and promoting peace. The new *International Day of Peaceful Coexistence* (28 January) is more about living together peacefully despite differences. This declaration reflects a growing recognition that peace is foundational to human dignity, sustainable development, and planetary survival. "Peace," as opined by Ndubisi (2016), "is a priceless

commodity for an authentic human existence” (p.xii).

Yet, declarations alone cannot resolve the lived realities of violence and insecurity. In Nigeria, the struggle for peaceful coexistence remains acute. Persistent insurgency, armed banditry, communal conflicts, and climate-induced displacement continue to undermine social cohesion across Nigeria, especially in the northern and middle belt regions. Armed groups and criminal networks have expanded their reach, carrying out kidnappings, massacres, and raids that have displaced millions and eroded trust within communities (ACAPS, 2025; Atlantic Post, 2025). In response to chronic insecurity, the federal government reopened some schools in parts of northern Nigeria in early 2026, even as the threat of abduction and violent attack remains high; many schools in areas such as Niger and Kaduna states remain closed due to ongoing safety concerns (Reuters, 2026; Internazionale, 2026). Human rights organisations have documented how relentless school kidnappings have led to closures, lost learning opportunities, and increased fear among parents and students, further hindering social stability (Human Rights Watch, 2025). This insecurity is compounded by severe food insecurity driven by conflict-related disruptions to agriculture and humanitarian assistance, with the United Nations warning that millions of Nigerians face crisis levels of hunger amid reduced aid and persistent militant activity (Reuters, 2026; UN Office at Geneva, 2025). These overlapping crises: violence, displacement, and deprivation, continue to deepen social vulnerability and mistrust, complicating efforts toward peaceful coexistence and national cohesion.

These developments compel us to question dominant understandings of peace. If societies can be free from formal war yet remain engulfed in fear, hunger, injustice, and environmental degradation, then peace must be something more profound than the absence of armed conflict. It is within this context that the researcher reiterates a position he has long advanced: peace is harmony with oneself, harmony with one's neighbours, and harmony with one's environment (Ndubisi, 2016). This wholistic understanding of peace provides the conceptual foundation for meaningful peaceful coexistence on planet earth.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION: BEYOND NEGATIVE PEACE

Traditional peace discourse has been dominated by what Johan Galtung (1969) described as *negative peace*, that is, the mere absence of direct violence. While this conception remains influential in diplomatic and security frameworks, it fails to account for structural injustice, psychological trauma, and environmental degradation. Contemporary peace research increasingly demonstrates that societies may be “peaceful” in military terms yet deeply unstable in social and moral terms (IEP, 2025, Francis, 2017).

Peaceful coexistence, therefore, must be understood as an active, ethical, and relational process. It involves the capacity of individuals and groups to manage differences nonviolently, to build inclusive institutions, and to cultivate mutual respect (United Nations, 2025). From a philosophical perspective, peaceful coexistence presupposes moral agency, responsibility, and recognition of human and ecological interdependence.

Nigeria's experience illustrates this vividly. Communal conflicts, ethno-religious tensions, and environmentally driven violence, particularly farmer–herder clashes exacerbated by climate change, persist even in the absence of declared war (International Crisis Group, 2024). This underscores the inadequacy of narrow peace definitions and the necessity of a deeper, more integrative framework.

THE WHOLISTIC UNDERSTANDING OF PEACE

From the etymological perspective, peace is derived from the Latin word: 'pax' which simply means freedom from civil disorder. But experience has shown that peace is much more than just freedom from civil disorder. This brings us to what I referred to as a new and wholistic understanding of peace: harmony with oneself; harmony with one's neighbours; and harmony with one's environment (Ndubisi, 2016, pp. 4–5). This framework departs from fragmented approaches by emphasizing the intrinsic interconnectedness of the psychological, social, and ecological dimensions of human existence.

i. Peace as Harmony with Oneself

Peace begins with the individual. One cannot give peace if one does not have peace within oneself. Inner peace entails psychological balance, moral clarity, and emotional stability. Ndubisi (2016) vehemently argued: “The person who does not possess peace cannot give peace to another person. We cannot look for peace outside when we do not have it within us” (p.4). More importantly, societies characterized by widespread trauma, frustration, and moral disorientation are fertile grounds for violence. Studies in peace psychology confirm that unresolved collective trauma significantly heightens the risk of conflict recurrence (Bar-Tal, 2020).

In Nigeria, prolonged exposure to violence has produced deep psychological scars, particularly among young people. Without deliberate investment in moral education, psychosocial healing, and value reorientation, sustainable peace remains unattainable (UNDP, 2024).

ii. Peace as Harmony with One's Neighbours

The second dimension of our wholistic understanding of peace concerns social harmony. One cannot say to be truly at peace when one maintains social injustice. Peaceful coexistence requires justice, inclusion, dialogue, and respect for diversity. Structural violence manifested through poverty, exclusion, and inequality, undermines social cohesion and perpetuates resentment (Galtung, 1969).

Nigeria's fragile social fabric reflects this reality. Perceptions of marginalization and unequal access to resources continue to fuel tensions across ethnic and regional lines (International Crisis Group, 2024). Peace, therefore, demands not only tolerance but equitable social arrangements and accountable governance.

iii. Peace as Harmony with the Environment

The third dimension of our wholistic understanding of peace is harmony with one's environment. This is very indispensable in our wholistic approach to peace. One cannot say to be at peace with oneself and one's neighbours and still be antagonistic to one's environment. Such claim is highly flawed as it lacked the essential part of the peace tripod. Any act of unjustifiable violence to the environment is a clear sign of lack of peace within an individual and the environment. Environmental degradation constitutes a form of violence insofar as it destroys livelihoods, displaces populations, and intensifies competition over scarce resources. The United Nations Environment Programme (2023) identifies climate change as a “threat multiplier” that exacerbates existing conflicts.

In Nigeria, desertification in the north and flooding in the south have heightened competition over land and water, directly undermining peaceful coexistence (World Bank, 2024). A peace framework that neglects ecological sustainability is fundamentally incomplete.

In sum, the wholistic understanding of peace underscores that genuine peace is multidimensional, interdependent, and ethically grounded. It begins within the individual, cultivating inner moral and psychological harmony; it extends outward to one's neighbours, requiring justice, inclusion, and relational accountability; and it encompasses the environment, recognizing that ecological integrity is inseparable from human wellbeing. Neglecting any of these dimensions compromises the sustainability of peace and highlights the limitations of approaches that focus solely on the absence of conflict. Through framing peace as a tripod of personal, social, and ecological harmony, this wholistic perspective not only expands the conceptual boundaries of peace theory but also provides a practical, ethical roadmap for cultivating durable and meaningful peaceful coexistence at local, national, and planetary levels (Ndubisi, 2016; UNEP, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

THE PRINCIPLE OF EJIKEMEUWA (NONVIOLENCE)

At the moral core of this wholistic framework for peace lies the Principle of *Ejikemuewa*, an indigenous African ethic of active nonviolence and moral self-restraint. As a philosophical principle, *Ejikemuewa* maintains that “violent approach to things does not bring lasting peace. Men and women are in need of peace. The best way to achieve this peace is through nonviolent means” (Ndubisi, 2012, pp. 99 – 104; Ndubisi, 2016, p. 130). The principle does not signify passivity; rather, it affirms the ethical strength required to resist violence even under provocation. One thing to note is that the principle of *Ejikemuewa* is not an absolute principle: it is a near-absolute. This is because of the fact that it allows for the temporary application of violence as a means to an end but not as an end in itself.

[T]he principle of *Ejikemuewa* is not an absolute in itself. There are times when the application of force could be allowed temporarily as a means to stop aggression so that constructive means (peace talk) can be employed. Nevertheless, one should bear in mind that lasting peace can only have its way through non-violence, that is, the acceptance and application of the principle of *Ejikemuewa*. Anything short of this can only bring peace in disguise but not real peace (Ndubisi, 2016, 130 – 131).

Empirical research supports the effectiveness of nonviolent approaches. Studies have consistently shown that nonviolent movements are more likely to achieve durable peace and political change than violent struggles, as they foster participation, legitimacy, and reconciliation rather than entrenched resentment and cycles of retaliation (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Ndubisi, 2016, pp. 50 – 77). In practice, *Ejikemuewa* provides a moral and operational framework for conflict resolution, guiding individuals, communities, and institutions to adopt dialogue, restorative justice, and cooperative problem-solving as central strategies.

Beyond its practical utility, *Ejikemuewa* also contributes to the theoretical advancement of peace studies. Through linking ethical nonviolence to the wholistic understanding of peace, encompassing personal, social, and ecological harmony, it grounds peace not only in institutional or political mechanisms but in moral transformation and ethical responsibility. In contemporary contexts marked by protracted conflict, climate stress, and social fragmentation, the principle of *Ejikemuewa* offers a culturally grounded, philosophically robust, and universally relevant approach to fostering sustainable and meaningful peaceful coexistence.

In essence, the Principle of *Ejikemuewa* exemplifies the synergy between moral philosophy and practical peacebuilding. It bridges the gap between ethical theory and actionable practice, demonstrating that lasting peace is achievable not through coercion or force but through disciplined, principled, and relational nonviolence that respects human dignity, promotes social justice, and

safeguards the environment. As such, *Ejikemeuwa* serves as both a guiding principle and a methodological tool for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners committed to the cultivation of authentic, enduring peace (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Ndubisi, 2016; UNEP, 2023).

INTEGRATIVE PLANETARY PEACE THEORY

Building upon the foundational insights of the wholistic understanding of peace and the Principle of *Ejikemeuwa*, the present researcher now proposes the Integrative Planetary Peace Theory (IPPT). This theory offers a comprehensive framework for understanding and advancing peace in a world characterized by complex interdependencies, global crises, and ecological vulnerability. At its core, IPPT asserts that sustainable peace emerges from the continuous and dynamic integration of three interrelated dimensions: inner moral harmony, social justice, and ecological balance; all operationalized through the philosophical principle of nonviolence (the principle of *Ejikemeuwa*).

1. Philosophical Foundations of IPPT

IPPT departs from traditional, state-centric, and militaristic models of peace, which often focus narrowly on the cessation of conflict, border security, or political stability. While these approaches have practical value, they frequently overlook the moral, psychological, and ecological dimensions that determine the durability of peace. IPPT situates peace within a planetary ethical horizon, recognizing that human wellbeing is inextricably linked to the health of social and natural systems. In other words, a society cannot be considered truly at peace if its members suffer from moral or psychological dissonance, social injustice, or environmental degradation (Ndubisi, 2016; UNEP, 2023). Integrating these dimensions, IPPT positions peace as a relational and dynamic state, rather than a static condition. It emphasizes process over outcome, highlighting the continuous ethical, social, and ecological work required to maintain harmony in an interconnected world.

2. Inner Moral Harmony of IPPT

The first dimension of IPPT, inner moral harmony, recognizes that sustainable peace begins within the individual. Peaceful societies cannot emerge from populations characterized by moral confusion, unresolved trauma, or emotional instability. Inner peace involves cultivating self-awareness, ethical discernment, emotional regulation, and resilience, enabling individuals to respond constructively to conflict and disagreement. Psychological research confirms that trauma, frustration, and social alienation significantly heighten the risk of violent behavior and societal instability (Bar-Tal, 2020; UNDP, 2024).

In the IPPT framework, the cultivation of inner moral harmony is inseparable from the practice of *Ejikemeuwa* (nonviolence). Individuals must internalize the ethical principle that nonviolent engagement is both a moral obligation and a practical strategy for building trust, resolving conflicts, and fostering cooperation. Inner moral harmony thus functions as the ethical foundation of planetary peace, anchoring social and environmental dimensions in personal responsibility and virtue.

3. Social Justice and Relational Harmony of IPPT

The second dimension of IPPT emphasizes social justice and relational harmony. Peace is not fully realized when individuals live in isolation from structural inequities or social conflict. IPPT holds that societies must cultivate inclusive institutions, equitable distribution of resources, participatory governance, and respect for diversity. These practices mitigate structural violence, reduce

grievances, and foster the legitimacy of social systems (Galtung, 1969; Ndubisi, 2020; International Crisis Group, 2024).

Relational harmony also entails dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual accountability. In plural societies, nonviolent management of differences, guided by the principle of *Ejikemeuwa*, strengthens social cohesion and prevents conflicts from escalating into violence. Empirical studies indicate that inclusive, nonviolent strategies are more likely to produce enduring stability than coercive or militarized approaches (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). In this way, social justice becomes both a moral imperative and a strategic mechanism for sustaining peace.

4. Ecological Balance of IPPT

The third dimension of IPPT highlights the inseparability of human and ecological wellbeing. Environmental degradation, such as deforestation, desertification, flooding, and resource depletion, directly undermines livelihoods, exacerbates inequality, and triggers conflict over scarce resources (UNEP, 2023; World Bank, 2024). IPPT asserts that environmental stewardship is a central component of peace, not an optional complement. Thus, integrating ecological balance into the concept of peace, IPPT acknowledges that humanity's ethical obligations extend beyond social relations to include the natural world. Sustainable peace requires responsible interaction with the environment, long-term ecological planning, and collective action to mitigate climate risks. This perspective transforms peace from a human-centered endeavor into a planetary responsibility, aligning human flourishing with the health of the biosphere.

5. Nonviolence as Methodological and Ethical Core of IPPT

Across all three dimensions, IPPT operationalizes peace through nonviolence, as articulated in the Principle of *Ejikemeuwa*. Nonviolence is both a moral imperative and a practical methodology: it ensures that conflict is addressed without perpetuating cycles of retaliation, while promoting dialogue, restorative justice, and collaborative problem-solving. Even when force may be temporarily necessary to halt aggression, nonviolence remains the ultimate guiding principle for achieving lasting and authentic peace (Ndubisi, 2016; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011).

Nonviolence in IPPT serves multiple functions: it anchors moral behavior, facilitates constructive engagement, and reinforces trust and cooperation at individual, communal, and planetary levels. This integration ensures that peace is not merely the absence of conflict but the presence of ethical, social, and ecological harmony, sustained through continuous reflection, action, and moral accountability.

IMPLICATIONS OF IPPT FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE

The Integrative Planetary Peace Theory (IPPT) carries far-reaching implications for how peaceful coexistence is understood, pursued, and sustained in an increasingly interconnected yet fragile world. Reconceptualizing peace as the outcome of the continuous integration of inner moral harmony, social justice, and ecological balance, operationalized through nonviolence, IPPT moves peaceful coexistence beyond tolerance or mere survival towards ethical, relational, and sustainable living on planet earth.

1. Reframing Peaceful Coexistence as an Ethical Process, Not a Passive Condition

One of the most significant implications of IPPT is its rejection of peaceful coexistence as a passive or accidental state. In many societies, coexistence is often understood as the absence of open conflict among diverse groups. IPPT challenges this minimalistic conception by framing peaceful coexistence as an active ethical process that requires moral discipline, responsibility, and deliberate engagement. From the IPPT perspective, coexistence is sustained not merely by legal arrangements or security mechanisms but by the moral dispositions of individuals and communities. Inner moral harmony becomes foundational: individuals who are psychologically stable, ethically grounded, and emotionally balanced are more capable of managing differences nonviolently. This implies that peacebuilding efforts must prioritize moral education, psychosocial healing, and value reorientation, especially in post-conflict and violence-prone societies (Ndubisi, 2019; Bar-Tal, 2020; UNDP, 2024).

2. Strengthening Social Cohesion Through Justice and Inclusion

IPPT underscores that peaceful coexistence is unsustainable in contexts marked by structural injustice, exclusion, and inequality. Social harmony cannot thrive where significant segments of the population experience marginalization or systematic deprivation. Consequently, IPPT reinforces the argument that justice is not peripheral to peace but constitutive of it. In plural and multiethnic societies such as Nigeria, IPPT implies that peaceful coexistence requires inclusive governance, equitable access to resources, and fair representation across social, ethnic, and religious lines. This aligns with empirical findings that grievances rooted in perceived injustice often serve as catalysts for communal violence and prolonged instability (Galtung, 1969; International Crisis Group, 2024). Integrating social justice into the peace framework, IPPT provides a normative basis for policies that foster dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual recognition among diverse groups.

3. Elevating Nonviolence as the Preferred Mode of Managing Difference

Another critical implication of IPPT is the elevation of nonviolence, grounded in the Principle of *Ejikemeuwa*, as the most viable and morally defensible method for managing difference in a plural world. Peaceful coexistence inevitably involves disagreement, competing interests, and value conflicts. IPPT does not deny this reality; rather, it insists that how differences are managed determines whether coexistence remains peaceful or degenerates into violence. Hence, operationalizing peace through nonviolence, IPPT promotes dialogue, mediation, restorative justice, and communal responsibility as central tools for conflict management. This approach aligns with evidence demonstrating that nonviolent strategies are more effective in achieving lasting peace and reconciliation than violent or coercive methods (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Magayaki, Sweetwilliams, & Okugbeni, 2025; Nwachukwu, 2025; Zailani, Magaji, & Jafaru, 2025). In practical terms, IPPT supports peace infrastructures that empower communities to resolve disputes without resorting to force.

4. Integrating Environmental Stewardship into Peaceful Coexistence

A defining contribution of IPPT to peaceful coexistence is its explicit integration of ecological harmony into peace discourse. Traditional peace frameworks often treat environmental issues as secondary or external to peace and security. IPPT rejects this separation, emphasizing that human coexistence is impossible without environmental sustainability. Environmental degradation, manifested in climate change, desertification, flooding, and resource depletion, intensifies

competition, fuels displacement, and exacerbates social tensions (UNEP, 2023; World Bank, 2024). IPPT implies that peaceful coexistence must therefore include responsible environmental governance, sustainable resource management, and climate adaptation strategies. Communities cannot coexist peacefully when ecological systems that sustain life are systematically degraded.

5. Promoting a Planetary Ethic of Interdependence

IPPT expands the scope of peaceful coexistence from local and national contexts to a planetary ethical consciousness. In a globalized world, conflicts, environmental crises, and social injustices transcend borders. IPPT implies that peaceful coexistence must be grounded in the recognition of global interdependence that the wellbeing of one community, nation, or ecosystem is linked to the wellbeing of others. This planetary perspective encourages cooperation across nations, cultures, and disciplines, fostering shared responsibility for peace and sustainability. It aligns with contemporary global peace initiatives that emphasize human security, environmental protection, and cooperative problem-solving as pillars of global stability (United Nations, 2023; United Nations, 2025; United Nations Environment Programme, 2022; Human Security Unit, United Nations, 2021; United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, 2023; World Bank, 2022).

CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A MORAL ARCHITECTURE OF PLANETARY PEACE

As the world commemorates the *World Day of Peace*, this paper has argued that peaceful coexistence on planet earth can no longer be meaningfully pursued through fragmented, militarized, or state-centric paradigms of peace. The realities of persistent violent conflicts, social fragmentation, moral disorientation, and ecological crisis compel a fundamental rethinking of what peace means and how it can be sustained. Peace, as this keynote has maintained, is not merely the absence of war but the presence of moral harmony, social justice, and ecological balance.

Drawing from the wholistic understanding of peace, this discourse has emphasized that peace begins within the individual, extends to one's neighbours, and culminates in responsible engagement with the environment. Any peace framework that neglects one of these dimensions remains structurally deficient and ethically incomplete. The Principle of Ejikemeuwa (nonviolence) further provides the moral engine of this framework, affirming that while force may temporarily restrain aggression, only nonviolence can generate authentic and lasting peace. Violence, at best, produces peace in disguise; nonviolence alone produces peace in truth (Ndubisi, 2016).

Building upon these insights, the Integrative Planetary Peace Theory (IPPT) has been proposed as a comprehensive philosophical response to contemporary global challenges. IPPT situates peace within a planetary ethical horizon, recognizing the deep interdependence between personal morality, social structures, and ecological systems. It insists that peaceful coexistence is not a passive condition but an ongoing ethical practice, sustained through moral responsibility, justice-oriented institutions, environmental stewardship, and disciplined nonviolence.

For societies such as Nigeria, and indeed for the global community, IPPT offers a timely and actionable framework. It challenges policymakers to move beyond coercive security approaches, educators to prioritize moral and peace education, communities to embrace dialogue and restorative justice, and humanity at large to recognize that there can be no peace on a degraded planet. Peaceful coexistence, therefore, must be cultivated deliberately, lived consciously, and defended ethically.

In closing, peaceful coexistence on planet earth is not utopian idealism; it is a moral necessity. In an age defined by interconnected crises, humanity must rediscover peace as harmony with oneself, with others, and with the environment. Only through such a wholistic and integrative vision can peace cease to be merely proclaimed and become genuinely lived. Let me end by saying emphatically that when humanity learns to live in harmony with itself, with one another, and with the earth that sustains all life, peace will cease to be an aspiration and become a lived reality

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