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**Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil,  
political, economic, social and cultural rights,  
including the right to development**

### **Written statement\* submitted by Peace and Conflict Science (PACS) Institute, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status**

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[26 January 2025]

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\* Issued as received, in the language of submission only.



# Reinforcing the Foundations of Peace and Human Rights: A Call for Philosophical and Scientific Rigour

## Introduction

The Peace and Conflict Science (PACS) Institute respectfully addresses the Human Rights Council (HRC) on the imperative of re-examining the philosophical foundations underpinning universal human rights. As an interdisciplinary think tank at the nexus of cognitive science, philosophy of mind, and political science, The PACS Institute is committed to advancing a scientifically and philosophically sound understanding of peace and human rights. Our research provides a framework for addressing this most fundamental and most pressing critical issue at the heart of human rights advocacy and global peacecraft [1] [2].

## Key Issues and Context

The foundational justification for universal human rights, as explicitly stated within human rights documents—most notably the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)—relies on a philosophically precarious foundation of ‘faith’ as the basis for their universality [3]. What exactly is entailed in this term ‘faith’ is not explained anywhere in the UDHR or any other foundational human rights document.

This justification for the existence of universal human rights, often framed as an appeal to shared human dignity or divine endowment, lacks the empirical robustness and epistemic clarity needed to withstand the challenges posed by increasingly pluralistic and ideologically diverse global systems. Without a clear philosophical or scientific underpinning, the universality of these rights becomes susceptible to dismissal as subjective or culturally contingent. As highlighted by Féron, as long as human rights are justified by ‘faith’ alone, the whole paradigm remains philosophically fragile and vulnerable to exploitation by authoritarian regimes or political movements that claim adherence to alternative paradigms of social order, effectively undermining the universality of human rights [6].

Meanwhile, the global peace infrastructure grapples with a parallel fundamental issue: human rights are not the only framework suffering from a lack of epistemic justification; so too is the paradigm of peace. Peace is fundamentally connected to the framework of human rights, as both are essential to the stability and flourishing of societies. Peace creates the conditions under which human rights can be recognized, protected, and advanced, while human rights provide the ethical and legal framework that enables peace to be sustained.

Yet, peace differs from human rights in a critical way. While human rights openly acknowledge the absence of a “deeper consensus on their theoretical basis” [4] [5], peace has largely avoided such scrutiny. Peace operates under the presumption of philosophical stability, which dissolves under closer examination. Research consistently shows that peace, as a concept, is deeply contested. The lack of agreement over what constitutes peace underscores the complexity of the field and its implications for policy and practice. Stephenson emphasizes that “probably the most serious division in the field of peace research occurs over the definition of peace...there is no agreement over what is the central object of our study” [6] (p. 117). Pieper adds that the contested nature of peace will likely persist, stating, “the definition of ‘peace’ will continue to be contentious for the foreseeable future” [7] (p. 347).

The lack of consensus regarding the philosophical and scientific grounding for the twin paradigms of peace and human rights continues to have profound and immediate implications for global peacecraft. Both global peacefulness and freedom are in measurable decline, as documented in the Freedom in the World 2024 and Global Peace Index 2024 reports [8] [9]. These interlinked trends illuminate a critical need for philosophical re-evaluation and scientific inquiry into the nature of peace, rights, and the obligations that underpin them.

Given these challenges, it becomes clear that both peace and human rights must be elevated together, transcending their current reliance on fragmented or faith-based justifications. They must be grounded in frameworks that are scientifically rigorous and philosophically coherent, ensuring their foundations are not only conceptually robust but also universally compelling in their justification. By achieving this, the two paradigms can support and reinforce one another in advancing a stable and equitable global order.

## **Approach of the Peace and Conflict Science (PACS) Institute**

By critically examining the twin paradigms of peace and human rights in tandem, The PACS Institute seeks to establish a scientifically informed pathway for understanding the nature of peace. This understanding, in turn, provides a foundation for developing a philosophically and scientifically robust justification for claims affirming the existence of universal human rights.

Through its research, The PACS Institute has identified a striking yet largely unexamined intuition within political science: that the phenomenon of peace is inherently linked to the emergence, preservation, and advancement of sentience. As revealed in our studies, all political science definitions of peace converge on three fundamental elements: (1) peace is inherently social; (2) it occurs between sentient organisms; and (3) it mutually and equitably advances welfare [2]. Sentience in this case refers to the “capacity by which animals can have experiences that matter to the animal” [10]. These elements demonstrate that peace is not an abstract ideal, but a phenomenon deeply connected to the evolutionary mechanisms that enable sentient beings to cooperate, thrive, and create social systems that advance collective welfare.

To deepen this understanding, The PACS Institute employs an interdisciplinary framework that integrates cognitive science, the philosophy of mind, and political science. This approach illuminates how peace consistently emerges as a social phenomenon aimed at advancing mutual welfare, driven by the cognitive architecture of sentient beings and the social structures that underpin cooperation. By linking peace to the conditions necessary for sentience to flourish, The PACS Institute’s research provides a new lens for understanding peace as a fundamental component of human and societal development, while simultaneously strengthening the theoretical foundations of human rights.

## **Recommendations**

The PACS Institute urges the Council to:

### **1. Establish a Permanent Research Body**

Reinstate and modernize a Committee on the Philosophic Principles of Peace and Human Rights—a 2.0 version of the original ‘Committee on the Philosophic Principles of the Rights of Man’—to investigate the epistemic and empirical justifications for these paradigms. The original committee, formed under the auspices of UNESCO in the mid-20th century, brought together leading philosophers, scientists, and political theorists, including Jacques Maritain, to draft foundational principles that informed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights [5].

This updated committee would operate as a permanent, interdisciplinary research body tasked with bridging theoretical inquiry and actionable policy development. Its objectives would include creating comprehensive frameworks for understanding peace and human rights, facilitating global collaboration among experts, and ensuring that these paradigms are both conceptually sound and practically implementable in diverse contexts.

## 2. Promote Interdisciplinary and Cross-Sector Collaboration

Foster partnerships not only across philosophical, cognitive, and social sciences but also with international organizations, local governments, and civil society. These collaborations can ensure the development and application of frameworks for human rights and peace that are grounded in both scientific insight and local realities.

## 3. Adopt a Contextually Adaptive Approach to Peace and Rights

Build on the interdependence of peace, rights, and obligations by emphasizing strategies that account for diverse cultural and political contexts. Research should explore how shared experiences and local participation contribute to sustainable peace, while also identifying universal principles that can guide global policymaking.

## Conclusion

To ensure the resilience of human rights in an increasingly fragmented world, the HRC must commit to advancing their philosophical and scientific foundations. By grounding peace and rights in the shared trait of sentience, The PACS Institute believes a more durable and universally applicable framework can be established. We call upon the Council to foster this deeper understanding and lead the way in developing a more predictive and adaptive approach to sustaining peace globally.

We stand ready to contribute further to the Council's efforts in advancing this critical agenda.

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