

Chapter 4

The Role of Citizen Diplomacy in Reducing International Tensions and Problems

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ABSTRACT

Global issues such as environmental disasters, malnutrition, poorness, international economic inequalities, local and ethnic conflicts, migration phenomena, globalization paradoxes, and other crises and challenges are so complex that governments and traditional diplomacy cannot tackle them alone. Therefore, diplomacy has expanded beyond the monopoly of governments. One of these new forms of diplomacy is citizen diplomacy or “people-to-people diplomacy.” This can involve NGOs, private peacemakers, scholars, or other “bridge builders.” Citizen diplomacy takes many forms, such as student/faculty exchanges, church programs bringing conflicting groups together, or cultural/scientific/sporting events that allow disputants to interact cooperatively or competitively. The informality of citizen diplomacy activities gives it a high degree of flexibility. This research aims to demonstrate the effectiveness and importance of citizen diplomacy in today's world, and its role in maintaining peace at the global level.

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INTRODUCTION

Today, citizens have found a special role and position as new players in the field of foreign policy. This new role has placed them alongside other traditional actors such as governments, international organizations, transnational corporations, and even terrorist groups. Citizens now have the ability and capacity to directly influence diplomatic and foreign policy processes. They actively participate in international dialogues and interactions through new communication tools, social networks, and information technologies. These tools allow citizens to shape public opinion and react to states' actions, giving them different influences in the international system.

The role of citizens in foreign policy is not limited to participation in public diplomacy and cultural exchange. They can also reduce the harmful effects caused by their governments' wrong domestic policies or inappropriate foreign policies of other governments. Through global campaigns, social pressure, and direct communication with citizens of other countries, they can persuade governments to reform and change their policies. These developments indicate a significant change in the concept of power and influence in the international system. Power is no longer concentrated solely in the hands of governments and large organizations; citizens are now known as effective and influential forces in the field of foreign policy. This development offers a new perspective on diplomacy and international interactions in which citizens play an active role in shaping and directing global policies.

In the changing global system, while acknowledging that States are still the main actors of international relations, it is emphasized that the challenges in human society are so complex and intertwined that nation-states alone cannot address them. Therefore, the global civil society needs to play a role in international issues and be effective in various fields. By accessing new communication and information technologies, citizens can now participate in international relations alongside other actors. Focusing on the active participation of citizens, non-governmental organizations, and civil groups, this type of diplomacy has complemented and strengthened traditional diplomacy and created new ways to communicate and interact among nations.

Citizen diplomacy refers to activities aimed at information sharing and cultural trade-off by private citizens, with the goal of becoming more familiar with the citizens involved in a dispute and developing common views and values among them. This type of diplomacy can create a favorable image of a country in the minds of others and influence the political orientations of other countries towards each other. Citizen diplomacy, as an effective tool in strengthening relations between nations and reducing international tensions, plays a vital role in the contemporary world. This type of diplomacy, which takes place through people's interactions and cultural, scientific, and economic cooperation, can create new communication bridges between

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