

International Day of Peace
Student Observance
18 September 2009
United Nations, New York

DISARM NOW FOR A BETTER WORLD

Remarks by Sergio Duarte
High Representative for Disarmament Affairs

The International Day of Peace is a time to reflect on the horror and cost of war and the benefits of peacefully resolving disputes. This year, the Secretary-General decided to use this important day to ask governments and citizens of the world to focus on the vital issues of nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation.

Unless we vigorously work for both of these historic goals, we will continue to face threats from nuclear weapons—including threats from existing weapons, threats from weapons acquired by additional states, and threats stemming from the nightmare of nuclear terrorism. Despite these serious dangers, there are many exciting new opportunities for progress in reducing or eliminating them. The world, for example, is witnessing a new wave of interest in advancing nuclear disarmament goals. Virtually all UN member states share a common interest in expanding international cooperation to address non-proliferation and counter-terrorism goals. We can—and we must—build on this momentum.

All of these dangers relate in one way or another to the continued existence of nuclear weapons, and this is why the world is now paying much closer attention to the goal of eliminating such weapons worldwide.

To that end, the Secretary-General launched the “WMD-WeMustDisarm!” campaign. Over the last 97 days, leading up to the International Day of Peace, the United Nations and our partners around the world have been working to raise awareness of the true costs and dangers of nuclear weapons. From 13 June there has been a multiplatform campaign issuing daily reasons to disarm, via Twitter, MySpace, Facebook, email, text message, radio and from friend-to-friend. Many of you might have seen it or have become involved with this worthy cause.

WeMustDisarm, since there would be no winners in a nuclear war. WeMustDisarm, because the world will be more secure and stable without nuclear weapons. WeMustDisarm, so that we can redirect precious resources to health, education and development.

The Secretary-General has been joined in this campaign by United Nations Messenger of Peace and actor/director Michael Douglas, who has championed the cause of disarmament for the United Nations since 1998, and American actor Rainn Wilson, who many of you will know is a star of the TV series “The Office.” They have both helped us spread the message.

But you too can join this campaign. Young people of this world have an important role to play and should voice their concerns over important global issues such as nuclear weapons and small arms.

As we observe the International Day of Peace with world leaders next week at the 64th Session of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General will certainly proclaim one strong, simple message: WeMustDisarm!

Also next week, the Security Council will meet at the level of heads of State and Government to address the issue of nuclear disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation. This Summit is intended to draw attention at the highest levels of government to the nuclear dangers confronting the international community and the urgency of taking concrete steps to address them. The Council's contributions could include promoting universal membership in key treaties, ensuring compliance, promoting the entry into force of treaties, assessing the need for new agreements and promoting nuclear-weapon-free zones. This important Summit is also intended to be an opportunity for states to reaffirm their commitment to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to work toward a world without nuclear weapons.

Before concluding, I would like to mention that my Office has just recently published a booklet called Basic Guide to Disarmament. It explains why disarmament is so important, describes the United Nations role in disarmament, and offers some ideas on how you can stay informed and get involved. Copies are available outside as you leave.

I welcome you all to the United Nations and hope you will join with your friends and fellow students both here and overseas in supporting disarmament goals. The world needs your help, and I know you have a lot to contribute. My very best wishes to you all.