



**KEYNOTE ADDRESS
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**ON
“BUILDING THE CULTURE OF PEACE:
AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
IN THE MOST VULNERABLE COUNTRIES”**

**AT THE
GLOBAL CONFERENCE ON
“BUILDING A JUST AND SUSTAINABLE PEACE”**

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As I stand here to speak, I am aware of one of the most striking reminders in the annals of human history that took place in this city against violence, against hatred and most importantly against war and conflict. On 6 August, the world observed the Hiroshima Day and we renewed our commitment to end war as a social institution. I feel particularly privileged to associate myself with this global conference devoted to just and sustainable peace being held in this historic metropolis, in this city of peace. We are very honoured to have the gracious presence and participation of two eminent Nobel laureates, - Dr. Shirin Ebadi and Professor Jody Williams – whose continuing contribution to peace inspire us all. I am delighted that we have the whole-hearted support of Mayor Tadatashi Akiba whose leadership of the “Mayors for Peace” initiative has earned our deep appreciation. Our dear Conference Chair Dr. Sorosh Roshan has been main anchor for this remarkable event working tirelessly for more than a year to make it happen. Our deep gratitude to you, Sorosh.

Our conference is taking place at a time of some of the worst violence against civilians we have seen in recent years. Clearly, the hope that the new millennium would be a harbinger of peace has turned out to be rather misplaced. The end of the cold war that promised a new era of global cooperation and the technological breakthroughs at the dusk of the last millennium have not delivered the sustainable peace that the world yearned and hoped for. The lesson in this, I believe, is that however much the world around us changes, we cannot achieve peace without a change in our own minds, and therefore in the global consciousness. The wealth and the technology can only give us the opportunity to better the world. We must have the mind to seize that opportunity; we must have the culture of peace developed in each one of us both as an individual as well as a member of the global society. We must remember that technology and wealth can be put to destructive use too. The difference between war and peace, between poverty and prosperity, between death and life, is essentially made in our minds.

The history of human progress tells us how enormous the contribution of human creativity had been for the achievements in every area of human interest – in science, literature, arts, management and medicine. The mind has played a pivotal role in advancing prosperity, well-being and enjoyment and made the world a better place to live in. But there is another side to the human mind as well. That other side is capable of breeding intolerance, harboring hatred and inflicting pain on fellow human beings. It is this side of the human mind that poses the gravest challenge for mankind. The challenge would be to prevent the human mind from getting consumed by ignorance, fear, violence, fratricide and intolerance. We have seen what these can do to undermine the progress of the human race and how they have caused wars, intra-state conflicts, violence and social strife. We have seen worst forms of intolerance in racism and xenophobia. There has been widespread deprivation, conflict over scarce resources and suppression of human rights. A culture of war and violence has spread threatening to destroy all that had been good, moral and just. To prevent history from repeating itself, the values of non-violence, tolerance and democracy would have to be inculcated in every woman and man – children and adult alike. The flourishing of a culture of peace will generate the mindset that is the prerequisite for the transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace.

We are living in years when people fear deadly attacks by terrorists; when people suffer from genocide or massive violations of human rights. Despite the great advances in science and medicine, millions are dying from HIV/AIDS. Despite all the efforts, too many people live

in extreme poverty, hunger, disease, or do not have access to clean water, or basic education and health. Worst-hit victims everywhere are the women and the children.

This underscores well the focus of my presentation: “Building the Culture of Peace: An Essential Component of Sustainable Development in the Most Vulnerable Countries.” By definition, vulnerable countries - the poorest and weakest segment of the international community – are the most susceptible to both natural and man-made disasters, manifested through conflict, genocide and civil strife. Pervasive poverty and limited human, financial, technical and institutional capacities in these countries do not only breed conditions for conflict, but they also severely limit their ability to deal with the consequences of war and conflict.

That poverty is a major source of conflict is not disputable. It is not by coincidence that sub-Saharan Africa, the only region that has been getting poorer over the last two decades, also has the highest incidence of conflict in the world. As we entered the new millennium, more people were being killed in conflicts in this region than in the rest of the world combined. Unrelenting poverty, declining economic growth, poor infrastructure, weak administration and the abundance of cheap weapons combine to make conflicts difficult to avoid, to control or to end. Sub-Saharan Africa, home to 34 of the world's 50 most vulnerable countries, may suffer from these ills in a bigger way, but they afflict all the 50 Least Developed Countries (LDCs), making them particularly prone to devastating effects of conflict.

About 370 million people – nearly 50 percent of the entire population of these countries – live in extreme poverty. To make matters worse, the number of the extremely poor is projected to rise by 100 million by 2015, the target date for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. With such massive poverty and weak state capacities, the potential for even greater conflict in these vulnerable countries is real. Indeed, at least a third of these countries are either in or emerging from conflict or experiencing high levels of political instability.

Of course, not only does poverty breed conflict, but conflict also cultivates poverty. Massive displacement of civilians, destruction of social and physical infrastructure and diversion of resources towards military activities all combine to depress economic activity, deprive people of their livelihoods and deny them basic services such as healthcare, education, food and water. It is not surprising, therefore, that of the 20 countries with the worst child mortality rates in the world, 18 are LDCs, and half of these are either experiencing conflict or are emerging from conflict. This is a clear illustration of the adverse effects of poverty and conflict. Without addressing these twin problems, we have no chance of achieving sustainable development in these countries. The Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict has put the cost to the international community of the conflicts of the 1990s, not including Kosovo, at \$199 billion. That is eight times more than what all the 50 Least Developed Countries received in Official Development Assistance in 2004. Just imagine the difference this amount of money could make if spent on improving the lives of the poor. If enough efforts and resources were invested in fighting poverty, many of the costly conflicts we have experienced would probably not have occurred. Fighting poverty is therefore a wise investment in achieving peace.

More than in any other time in history, the world has the wealth and the technology to end poverty and promote peace. But this unprecedented wealth can itself turn into a source of conflict, if it is concentrated in a few hands within countries and a in a few countries in the world, leaving the larger part of humanity socially, economically and politically marginalized. A situation where the world's six richest individuals command more wealth than the combined annual income of the 50 Least Developed Countries, with 370 million people subsisting on less than a dollar a day, can hardly be described as equitable. And without equity and justice in the world, sustainable peace cannot be achieved.

Poverty and lack of opportunities deprive people of their dignity as human beings, leaving them hopeless and incapable of pursuing the kind of life they may desire. Marginalization and abuse because of ethnicity, gender or religion, social turbulence, repression, violence and terror are all closely linked to poverty and the concurrent lack of basic human rights.

Non-violence can truly flourish when the world is free of poverty, hunger, discrimination, exclusion, intolerance and hatred. When women and men can realize their highest potential and live a secure and fulfilling life. Until then, each every one of us would have to contribute – collectively and individually – to build peace through non-violence. We have to succeed together or together we shall perish. The choice is obvious.

In my view, two things are needed to achieve and sustain peace in the world:

- We need to improve the objective living conditions of the whole of humanity through poverty eradication, economic development, good governance and democratization and respect for human rights.
- We also need to change the subjective conditions that breed conflict – our beliefs and our prejudices – by cultivating the values of tolerance and understanding, in short, the culture of peace, in our mindsets. It is particularly important to ensure that children benefit from education and upbringing that promote peaceful resolution of conflict, tolerance and respect for human dignity.

Of course, global efforts to address these problems have been going on for decades. The very founding of the United Nations in 1945 was motivated by the desire “to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war” and “to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.” Unfortunately, we are not any nearer to achieving these goals than we were in 1945. And yet the need to banish poverty and conflict has never been greater, given that with globalisation, our destinies are becoming ever more intertwined. Human tragedies in one part of the world affect us all, be it through economic shocks, refugee flows and forced migration or increased threats of terrorism.

The world certainly has the economic and technological resources to effectively address the challenges of poverty and conflict in the vulnerable countries. In my view, the culture of peace can provide an effective moral framework to deploy these resources for poverty eradication and sustainable development. As a set of values, modes of behaviour and ways of life based on respect for life, human rights, non-violence and the economic and social wellbeing of each and every human person, the culture of peace can be a powerful tool in promoting a global consciousness that serves the interests of a just and sustainable peace.

A lot of efforts have been made to promote the culture of peace in global forums. The United Nations designated 2000 as the “International Year of the Culture of Peace” and of the years 2001 to 2010 as the “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.” In 1999, the United Nations adopted the Declaration and Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace, a monumental document that transcends boundaries, cultures, society and nations. Unlike many General Assembly documents, the document is action-oriented. It encourages actions at all levels – the individual, the family, the community, the nation, the region and the international level. The principles of the culture of peace were re-affirmed at the largest ever gathering of the world’s leaders at the World Summit of September last year as the United Nations observed six decades of its existence.

These are very important developments. However, a lot more needs to be done if the culture of peace is to have the necessary impact on poverty and conflict. It needs to move out of the international conference rooms to national parliaments, local governments, villages and homes. It needs to be transformed into a truly universal movement that guides policy actions as much as individual conduct. In short, we need to build a global citizenry whose everyday actions are guided by the values of peace and justice.

Fortunately, turning the culture of peace into a universal movement is not an expensive venture. It requires no grand scheme. All that is needed is for everyone to be a disciple for peace, and to practice what we preach. Whether it is at international conferences such as this, in places of worship, in schools or in our homes, a lot can be achieved in promoting the culture of peace. This is the only way we shall achieve a just and sustainable peace in the world. And for the world’s most vulnerable countries, it is an indispensable tool to achieving sustainable development.

Never has it been more important for the next generation to learn about the world and understand its diversity. The task of educating children and young people to find non-aggressive means to relate with one another is of primary importance. At the same time, I would stress the importance of women’s equal participation in all efforts for peace and security – in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building. While women are often the first victims of armed conflict, they must also and always be recognized as a key to the solution. We must strive to integrate their concerns more effectively in peace processes worldwide, and achieve women’s full, equal and effective participation in those processes. Women and girls have an essential role to play in rebuilding war-shattered societies, not through token representation but as full-fledged participants in the process.

Peace is a prerequisite for human development. And peace cannot be achieved unless the mind is at peace. We all must undertake efforts to inculcate peace in ourselves. We cannot expect to change the world if we do not start first and foremost with changing ourselves - at the individual level. I believe, therefore, the culture of peace should be the most appropriate vehicle to prepare our world in addressing effectively the complex challenges of the twenty-first century. In the changed world we live in, it is time to discard the eye for an eye approach. We have experienced enough violence. We cannot afford more. The time to act in NOW.
