



President of the General Assembly
His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser

Opening Statement

at

The General Assembly High Level Forum
on
The Culture of Peace

Friday, 14 September 2012

UN General Assembly Hall
New York

Your Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon,

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates,

Former Director-General of UNESCO, my dear friend Federico Mayor,

Distinguished Speakers and Moderators at the High Level Forum,

My friends from Civil Society,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the outset of the General Assembly's day-long High Level Forum on the Culture of Peace, I extend to all of you a very warm welcome.

I am delighted that you all could join us for this first-ever Forum of the Assembly on a subject close to our hearts, relevant to today's world and one that provides a direction to the sustainable future for our planet.

I am deeply honoured to convene this Forum on your behalf.

Yesterday marked exactly thirteen years since this Assembly took a momentous action by consensus - on 13 September 1999 - to adopt the United Nations Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace. Through this landmark adoption the General Assembly laid down humanity's charter for the new approaching millennium.

Adoption of this historic, norm-setting document has been considered one of the most significant and enduring legacies of the United Nations.

This document is action-oriented and identifies eight specific areas of action at all levels – the individual, the family, the community, the nation, the region and the global levels.

The principles of the culture of peace were re-affirmed at the largest ever gatherings of world leaders, which are the UN Millennium Summit in 2000 and the World Summit in 2005.

In addition, the United Nations designated 2000 as the “International Year of the Culture of Peace” and the years from 2001 to 2010 as the “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.”

At last year’s observance of the International Day of Peace as I took office, I renewed my personal commitment to “emphasise the need for the full and effective implementation of Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace, in cooperation, of course, with governments, the Secretary-General and civil society”.

The culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes and ways of life, based on the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, and respect for diversity, as well as on dialogue and understanding.

I believe spreading the culture of peace is most critical to our society today.

If we are to come out of the shadows of conflict and make a new beginning, all members of society must be inspired by the culture of peace.

I am pleased to observe that the culture of peace is receiving increasing global attention.

Through the efforts of the United Nations, civil society, regional organizations and peace loving states, a global movement for the culture of peace is emerging.

I believe the universal character of its applicability and relevance for the international community emerges very clearly through four special dimensions of the Declaration and Programme of Action.

First, the comprehensive approach of the Programme highlighting eight specific areas of action - beginning with education - moving to understanding, tolerance and solidarity and - concluding with international peace and security. These are truly the areas which do, and should, continue to receive humanity's engagement.

Second, the Programme pays special attention to the individual's self transformation. This is absolutely essential as each one of us is a part of the global community. Targeting the individual is meaningful because there cannot be true peace unless the individual mind is at peace.

The third dimension is that advancing the Programme's objectives galvanises the support of all actors. The wide array of actors, from parents to teachers, professionals to religious leaders, artists to intellectuals, is remarkable and underscores the fact that the culture of peace truly engages the society as a whole.

And finally, the culture of peace sets its goals, not on the principle of an eye for an eye but on tolerance, solidarity and dialogue to settle differences and heal wounds.

In addition to governments, civil society and the media have been given a very prominent role in promoting the culture of peace.

As the first of the eight action areas outlines how to foster the culture of peace through education, I strongly believe educators and educational institutions deserve a special attention.

If the culture of peace is to take deeper root in us and among us then we will need to reach out more effectively to the younger minds as they grow up.

We must place crucial focus on peace education.

To effectively meet the complex challenges of our time, the young of today deserve a radically different education - one that does not glorify war but educates for peace. We need an education that focuses on peace, non-violence and global understanding.

Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed when our collective approach is built on trust, dialogue and collaboration.

Realizing this need – the United Nations established the Alliance of Civilizations as an entity that promotes dialogue for peace and development.

During my Presidency of the General Assembly, and to set an example for the vision I believe in, I attended several events related to inter-faith efforts. At these events, we have discussed and promoted cross-cultural dialogue as a crucial component in our efforts to build peace, tolerance, harmony and mutual understanding around the world.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

We should also be aware that non-violence can truly flourish when the world is freed from poverty, hunger and discrimination – and when women and men can realize their highest potential and live a secure and fulfilling life.

In-equality, injustice and exclusion generate structural violence that is incompatible with peace at both national and international levels.

Another area we need to concentrate on is, giving long-overdue recognition to the fact that women have a major role to play in promoting the culture of peace and in bringing about lasting peace and reconciliation, particularly in strife-torn societies.

Unless women are at the forefront of the promotion and practice of the culture of peace, long-term solutions will elude us.

The cause of peace needs to be understood not only in the passive sense of the absence of war, but also in the constructive sense of creating conditions for equality and social justice.

As Dr. Martin Luther King has affirmed, “We must concentrate not merely on the negative expulsion of war but the positive affirmation of peace”.

In short, the human right to peace needs to be established as an autonomous right by the international community

Every one of us must be a true believer in peace and non-violence, and practice what we profess.

Whether it is at events such as this, in inter-governmental conferences, in places of worship, in schools or in our homes, a lot can be achieved in promoting the culture of peace through individual resolve and action.

In conclusion, I ask you to remember that the work to promote the culture of peace is a continuous process. Each of us can make a difference in that process.

Finally, I wish to extend my special thanks to the Foundation Culture of Peace, the Inter-Press Service (IPS), and the Global Movement for the Culture of Peace, for their cooperation.

I am also thankful for the support of the Permanent Missions of Bangladesh, Benin, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, the Philippines and South Africa, towards the success of this event.

I thank you.