



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

16 September 2019

Excellency,

With reference to the High-level Forum on the Culture of Peace to observe the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, held on 13 September 2019, at the United Nations Headquarters, I have the honour to transmit herewith a summary of the mandated event for your kind perusal.

May I take this opportunity to thank you once again for your continued support and commitment to a Culture of Peace, which this year observed the theme “The Culture of Peace: Empowering and Transforming Humanity”. I sincerely hope we will continue to be engaged and strive together to turn this vision into a reality in the 21st century.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "M. ESPINOSA".

María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



UNITED NATIONS HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON THE CULTURE OF PEACE

13 SEPTEMBER 2019, UN HEADQUARTERS, NEW YORK

20
YEARS

MAKING
THE UN
RELEVANT
FOR ALL

#CultureOfPeace20



United Nations High Level Forum on The Culture of Peace - 20th Anniversary
Convened by the President of the 73rd Session of the General Assembly
Friday, 13 September 2019, UN Headquarters, New York

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

The President of the General Assembly (PGA) convened on 13 September 2019 the High-Level Forum on the 20th Anniversary of the Culture of Peace, as mandated by GA Resolution 73/126 of 2018, devoted to the implementation of the Programme of Action on the occasion of the anniversary of its adoption, as an opportunity for renewing the commitments to further strengthen the global movement for the culture of peace.

The theme for the High-Level Forum, “The Culture of Peace: Empowering and Transforming Humanity”, reflected the enduring value of the culture of peace for the transformative 2030 Agenda and constituted a unique opportunity to highlight the interconnection between peace and sustainable development for successful action in the last decade of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The opening segment highlighted the need for peace to be part of our simple daily routine, especially by recommitting ourselves to the ideals of the Charter of the United Nations. Even though the Charter does not specifically mention the culture of peace, it is undoubtedly embedded in every word. The Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, unanimously adopted two decades ago, identified eight specific areas which encourage actions at all levels – the individual, the family, the community, the national, the regional and the global levels.

In her opening remarks, the PGA reaffirmed that “because peace is more than the absence of war, it needs constant nurturing through the pursuit of dignity and equality, of human rights and justice, of respect and understanding, and of cooperation and multilateralism”. During her speech, the PGA gave special recognition to Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, founder of the Global Movement for the Culture of Peace; former Permanent Representative of Bangladesh and former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations, for his longstanding contribution to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. She mentioned her efforts throughout the 73rd Session of the General Assembly to make the UN relevant for all, since “every person has a role to play in building a culture of peace – at home, at work, with friends and neighbours, on the streets and online’ and we – as diplomats and decision-makers, have a responsibility to create an enabling environment, by building peaceful, just and inclusive societies as envisaged in SDG 16”.

The Chef de Cabinet of the UN Secretary-General, Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, pointed out that, although peace is at the heart of the work of the United Nations, it is something that must be addressed daily: “A culture of peace is inseparable from human rights, respect for diversity, and fairer societies”. She noted that one of the main challenges to achieving the [SDGs](#) is to build more preventive and inclusive approaches that ensure the participation of women, young people and vulnerable, marginalized and non-represented groups. The Chef de Cabinet stressed that working to achieve peace not only covers traditional notions of security, but also challenges such as social injustice, the normalization of hate speech, terrorism, violence against women, and conflict.

The Nobel Peace Prize Laureate for 2011, Ms. Leymah Gbowee, delivered a solidarity message, in which she remarked that a culture of peace creates an environment where people thrive and have their needs met: “It looks like a population of satisfied people: healthy children, educated children, a functional health system, responsive justice structure, an empowered, recognized, appreciated and fully compensated community of women; food on the table of every home, and a lot more. It is the full expression of human dignity”. She said peace is seen as the absence of bad, rather than the presence of good. However, “if we dig a little deeper into what a culture of peace actually looks like, it pushes us beyond understanding peace as the absence of conflict and being a positive state itself”, she said.

As the keynote speaker, His Royal Majesty Otumfuo Osei Tutu II, Asantehene (King of the Ashanti people of Ghana), addressed the General Assembly for the very first time, representing a kingdom that has existed since the 17th century. He highlighted some of the UN’s accomplishments in preserving global security and preventing conflict between nations, but also warned that today’s international environment looks different: “Warfare is no longer the threat we face from states; it is now a danger we face on a daily basis from our citizens and from all quarters. This new threat comes on the heels of an unprecedented trust deficit in political leadership at the national level. The effect of this trust deficit is to erode the capacity of political leaders to rally their people to coalesce around national interests. The consequence for peace and security cannot be overstated”, he said. The Ashanti leader called for a new partnership between elected authorities and traditional governance, in the spirit of authentic collaboration.

During the plenary meeting, Member States stressed that the ongoing reforms of the UN peace and security pillar are crucial to further promoting the culture of peace. They emphasized the central role partners from the private sector, academia, civil society and the media have in supporting efforts in promoting the culture of peace. Member States also pointed out that inequalities, exclusion and poverty may have a negative impact on the culture of peace, while the speedy implementation of the SDGs and the promotion of inclusive growth can increase the chances of a lasting peace.

Member States exchanged their respective experiences and challenges and suggested possible measures to address today’s global challenges, highlighting in particular the importance and value of international cooperation. In this regard, they stressed the value of guidelines on a new mode of governance, which urges the entire UN system, all governments and peoples, including young people, to work together to build a freer, fairer and more peaceful world through a positive, dynamic and participatory process where multilateralism is encouraged and conflicts are resolved based on a culture of peace. Similarly, Member States voiced support for further strengthening the global movement to promote the culture of peace, particularly in the current global context, towards the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Following the plenary segment in the GA Hall in the morning, a panel discussion was held in the Trusteeship Council Chamber in the afternoon with the participation of invited panelists, discussants, and representatives of civil society organizations

The chair and moderator of the panel discussion, Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, recalled the history of the landmark and norm-setting Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace back in 1999, adopted by consensus by the General Assembly with no reservations, during the tenure of Mr. Didier Opertti of Uruguay as President of the 53rd Session of the General Assembly. Under a new agenda item on the culture of peace, allocated to the plenary of the GA for discussion on an annual basis, the General Assembly adopted in 1997 a resolution to declare the year 2000 the “International Year for the Culture of Peace”, and in 1998, a resolution to declare the period from 2001 to 2010 the “International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World”. On 13 September 1999, the United Nations finally adopted the Declaration and Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace, as a concept emphasizing that every one of us needs to consciously make peace and nonviolence a part of our daily existence.

The High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Miguel A. Moratinos, talked about the challenges for a transition from a culture of war to a culture of peace. He highlighted the ongoing efforts to confront the tragic problem of terror attacks against religious sites, recalling specifically the plan of action launched by the Secretary-General on 12 September 2019, entitled “The United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship - Rings of Peace”. Also, he stressed the need to act together as one and strive for solidarity to support one another and protect minorities, so that societies can move from mere coexistence to a world of harmony, or “convivencia”, in Spanish.

UNESCO’s Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, Ms. Nada Al-Nashif, highlighted that in the aftermath of the two World Wars, the realization of a peaceful world required a new architecture for peace, with the United Nations at the center of this collective effort. UNESCO was created to play a key role in this regard, as enshrined in its Constitution: “Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women that the defenses of peace must be constructed.” She noted that in order to confront today’s complex and cross-borders challenges, the international community must redouble efforts to create an inclusive and positive multilateralism, capable of strengthening a broad-based culture of peace. She recalled as positive steps in this direction the deliberations at the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in Baku, and the forthcoming first Biennale of Luanda, organized by UNESCO, the African Union and the government of Angola.

The President of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Ms. Gabriela Cuevas Barron, reaffirmed the role of parliamentarians in helping the transformation of humanity and the planet, considering that more inclusive dialogue, equality and tolerance are essential for democracy. Achieving the goals set out in the 2030 Agenda will require a collective effort and the participation of a wide range of partners, she noted. The core of the progress we make will be based on building partnerships within countries and across borders, as well as between members of parliament, representatives of government, civil society, the media, the private sector and international organizations. The ultimate objective of this common global effort is to leave no one behind, and to ensure that societies develop in peace, harmony and respect.

The Ambassador for Women, Peace and Security, appointed by Canada, Ms. Jacqueline O'Neill, reminded the audience that the pursuit of peace must be as important as any other goal, while emphasizing that men traditionally are seen taking the lead and making decisions on peace and security. Reconciliation is about promoting culture of peace, she added, and bias against women should be avoided and eradicated. She called for the urgent need to have more women participating and engaging in this conversation.

The Permanent Representative of Afghanistan to the United Nations, Ambassador Adela Raz, spoke about the challenges her country is facing for reconciliation and a peaceful settlement of disputes in a post-conflict situation, moving from conflict to a development agenda with women in the center of the deliberations. She elaborated on recent successful steps being taken in various areas in Afghanistan to develop the ability to live in a peaceful environment, stop violence and achieve sustainable peace.

The panel discussion highlighted that the culture of peace needs to be strengthened within all peoples, especially women, by making them peacebuilders to prevent conflicts and sustain peace as well as fundamental agents to make decisions. It also stressed respect for human rights as essential to peace, to further promoting the culture of peace in educational programmes. The culture of peace, it was stressed, cannot be built if hate speech continues to exist. Participants also noted that everyone must be a multi-stakeholder in this process, including educators, parents, governmental officials and civil society organizations. Multilateralism is fundamental to foster a culture of peace, the panelists agreed.

As discussant, Mr. Francisco Rojas Aravena, Rector of the University for Peace, summarized the contributions from the panelists and highlighted the role of the University of Peace in promoting education for peace, solidarity and non-violence for 40 years, including through its programmes for human rights, universal values, sustainable development, and other areas related to the SDGs. Since wars provoke more wars and destruction, this pattern must be broken for a culture of peace and trust to emerge and be consolidated, he said.

In his special comments, the Chairman of the Foundation for a Culture of Peace and former UNESCO Director-General, Mr. Federico Mayor Zaragoza, warned that much is said about security in territories, but much less so about the people living on them. Because military spending has reached extraordinary amounts every day, he said, discussions in the United Nations must have a new approach, placing the human being as a top priority. The old Latin adage, "si vis pacem para bellum", is happening today, he added, while recalling the birth of the United Nations in 1945 as the "multilateral democratic system of the world", following the steps of the pioneering experiment of the League of Nations 100 years ago.

Panelists stressed the need to construct peace as a personal behavior. Consequently, the use of language and education is essential on the development of a culture of peace to solve and prevent conflict, violence and war. They also noted that there is a shared global responsibility for ensuring the culture of peace and, therefore, both multilateral partnerships and international cooperation are necessary to tackle global threats. Participants underlined the importance of women, youth and other segments of society to have an increased role in reducing violence and preventing conflicts. Education for peace is essential, it was remarked, and in order to implement it the experiences, voices, and actions of local communities need to be heard to make peace possible.

In closing, participants were congratulated by the PGA for the support they have shown for the implementation of the SDGs in the context of a culture of peace. Her closing remarks summarized lessons learned during the plenary and panel discussions. The PGA stressed the need for concrete action by all stakeholders to realize this vision and reaffirmed the importance of investing in education and inclusivity; building social cohesion through inter-cultural, inter-community and inter-faith understanding; and promoting equality and respect in our societies to empower and transform humanity, also emphasizing the crucial contributions of women and youth in the whole cycle of peace, including conflict prevention, peacebuilding and reconstruction in post-conflict situations.

In conclusion, the High-Level Forum provided an opportunity for Member States, observers, UNESCO and other UN system entities, non-governmental organizations, academia, and all interested parties, to exchange ideas and make suggestions on how to build and further promote a culture of peace in the 21st century. The 20th anniversary observance called for a renewed approach to both peace and development, to bring more coherence and integration between the three pillars of the United Nations. In this context, the High-Level Forum provided a meaningful contribution to the pivotal discussions and commitments expected at the General Assembly during the High-Level Week later in September 2019.

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