



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

14 September 2020

Excellency,

Sequel to the High-level Forum on the Culture of Peace to commemorate the 21th Anniversary of the adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, held on 10 September 2020, via a virtual platform, I have the pleasure to transmit herewith, a summary of the mandated event for your kind perusal.

I take this opportunity to thank you, once more, for your strong support and commitment to the Forum on the Culture of Peace, which this year was held under the theme '*The Culture of Peace: Change our world for the better in the era of COVID-19*'. I sincerely hope we will remain engaged and strive together to turn this vision into reality.

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

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Tijjani Muhammad-Bande'.

Tijjani Muhammad-Bande

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



UNITED NATIONS HIGH LEVEL FORUM ON THE CULTURE OF PEACE



High Level Forum on The Culture of Peace – 21st Anniversary Convened by the President of the 74th Session of the General Assembly Thursday 10 September 2020, via a virtual platform

CHAIR'S SUMMARY

The President of the General Assembly (PGA) convened on 10 September 2020 the High-Level Forum on the 21st Anniversary of the Culture of Peace, as mandated by GA Resolution 74/21 of 2019, devoted to the implementation of the Programme of Action on the occasion of the anniversary of its adoption, as an opportunity for renewing the commitment to further strengthen the global movement for the culture of peace.

The theme for the High-Level Forum, “The Culture of Peace: Change our world for the better in the era of COVID-19”, reflected the enduring value of the culture of peace in building global solidarity as the utmost need of the time which can be achieved through promoting inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue that enable communities to come together to better understand each other and stand against the spread of hate, intolerance, division, and discrimination.

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 action at all levels – the individual, the family, the community, the national, the regional and the global levels.

In his opening remarks, the PGA reaffirmed that “**An indisputable human right, education is the foundation of peaceful and inclusive societies and a key driver of sustainable development**”. In his 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 tireless efforts to turn the concept of the culture of peace into an actionable agenda. He mentioned that as

President of the United Nations General Assembly at its 74th Session, he has the promotion of peace, poverty eradication, quality education, climate action and inclusion as his priorities, all of which are critical and strongly connected to the issue of peace and the attainment of the sustainable development goals.

The UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, pointed out that, since the United Nations was founded we have not faced such a complex and multidimensional threat to global peace and security, and “in the face of this grave danger, it is more important than ever to work for a culture of peace, as the essential foundation for global cooperation and action”. He noted that throughout the pandemic and beyond, we need to invest in social cohesion, recognizing that diversity is a richness, not a threat. Each community must feel that its identity is respected, while playing a full part in society as a whole. The Secretary-General stressed that the pursuit of peace is a continuous process based on choices and decisions we make every day and creating a culture of peace is a way of life, for individuals, communities and countries..

The Founder of the Global Movement for the Culture of Peace and Former Under-Secretary General and High Representative of the United Nations, 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 2012 when the first UN High Level Forum was initiated by the 66th PGA Ambassador Nassir Al-Nasser. This High Level Forum is being convened annually by the President of the General Assembly on or around 13 September as mandated by the Assembly’s own resolution, “because on that date in 1999 the UN took its most forward-looking stride aimed at ensuring a peaceful planet for all of us since the Charter of the UN in 1945”. The UN Charter arose out of the ashes of the Second World War and the UN Declaration and the Programme of Action on Culture of Peace emerged in the aftermath of the long-drawn Cold War. **He recalled that The essence of the culture of peace is a process of individual, collective and institutional transformation. Its objective is the empowerment of people. Though the Declaration and Programme of Action is an agreement among nations, governments, civil society, media and individuals are all identified in this document as key actors.**

UNESCO’s Assistant Director-General for Social and Human Sciences, Ms. Gabriel Ramos, highlighted that the pandemic has not only taken a tragic toll of human lives, but it has also dramatically exposed our vulnerabilities, shed light on our injustices, and disrupted our assumptions. It has reminded us of the need for a culture of peace – a culture of peace that is a way of life: “an instrument not only to avoid war, but to address longstanding tensions between individuals and technology; people and planet; and those who have and those who do not”. She noted the need for a culture of peace, the need for UNESCO, is more pronounced today than ever before. Peace is an essential enabler, and an ultimate outcome of a fairer, sustainable world.

The Chief de Cabinet of the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Ms. Nihal Saad, talked about the COVID 19 pandemic that has laid bare the world’s vulnerabilities, divisions, falsehoods and brutal inequalities. She 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, she stressed the need to fulfill goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development “building peaceful, just and inclusive societies,” as more imperative now than ever before..

Mr. Francisco Rojas Aravena, Rector of the University for Peace, noted that the pandemic has caused the reemergence of old fears and great mistrust. “Fear of the “other”, of “uncertainty”, creates feelings of insecurity. Discrimination and exclusion increase, which lead to hateful discourse and violent actions. He stressed that The Culture of Peace and Nonviolence contributes positive values to confront fear and discrimination. It transforms conflictive situations into opportunities for understanding and association. The 2030 Agenda is the path that allows us to face great planetary threats. Prevention and anticipatory actions establish the ways to overcome them and build a better world for all. He highlighted the role of the University of Peace in developing “Peace Capital” and “Resources for Non-Violence. Building a different future, a “new” post-pandemic reality, is feasible. We know the global public goods we need. The *2030 Agenda* will allow us to achieve them and ensure no one is left behind”, he said.

During the plenary meeting, Member States stressed that the pandemic has highlighted the vulnerabilities and inequalities, increasing intolerance and tensions within communities, and between states. They emphasized the rising headwinds against multilateralism and globalization, leading to growing uncertainty and volatility in the international landscape. Member States also pointed out that the international community needs to intensify efforts for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and support national efforts to tackle the devastating impacts of the pandemic on economy and society in most fragile countries of the world.

Member States suggested bridging divides within the society and instilling in our younger generations the values, attitudes and ways of life embodying a culture of peace as the best way of preventing and eliminating extremism and intolerance. They stressed that It is through education that we can bring about the structural changes needed to change the world for the better, as it gives young people the skills to rebuild war-torn societies but also enables us to instill in future generations a culture of tolerance and respect between peoples. 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.

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 on how to change our world for the better and further promote a culture of peace in the era of COVID-19. The 21st anniversary observance was held at a time the COVID-19 pandemic continues to upend economies and societies, while also threatening to erode trust in societies all over the world. 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 2020.

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