Presentation

By

Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury

Former Under-Secretary-General and
High Representative of the United Nations

on

“The Culture of Peace: Agenda for New Global Civilization”

Sponsored by The Global Forum, The International House

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Good evening to you all!
Dr. Migala, Ladies and Gentleman, I am delighted to join you at this event sponsored by The Global Forum, The International House at the University of California San Diego (UCSD) in collaboration with The San Diego World Affairs Council, The San Diego Diplomacy Council and The UN Association of USA, San Diego. I thank Bettina Hausmann for her welcoming remarks and Joanne Tawfilis for her kind introduction.

My presentation this evening is titled “The Culture of Peace: Agenda for New Global Civilization”. I hope to leave behind thereafter some better understanding of the issues most relevant to the culture of peace as well as an increased energy and greater commitment to undertake our responsibilities as global citizens.

Last September, for the fourth time in a row, the U.N. High Level Forum on The Culture of Peace was convened by the President of the UN General Assembly. This annual gathering of the apex intergovernmental body of the United Nation deliberating on peace and non-violence at the U.N. headquarters in New York. This daylong event is an opportunity for U.N. Member States, U.N. system entities, media and civil society interested in discussing the ways and means to promote the Culture of Peace and in joining the discourse on strengthening the global movement for the implementation of the UN Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace adopted by consensus by the General Assembly on 13 September 1999. Identifying eight specific areas, the document encourages actions at all levels – the individual, the family, the community, the nation, the region and, of course, the global level. Though the Programme of Action is an agreement among nations, governments, civil society, media and individuals are all identified in this document as key actors.

The adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace was a watershed event as an appropriate response to the evolving dynamics of global war and security strategies in a post-Cold War world. It has been an honour for me to Chair the nine-month long negotiations that led to its adoption.

This historic norm-setting document is considered as one of the most significant legacies of the United Nations that would endure generations. For me, this has been a realisation of my personal commitment to peace and my humble contribution to humanity.

In a historical perspective, it is worthwhile to note that asserting and re-affirming the commitment of the totality of the United Nations membership to build the Culture of Peace, the General Assembly has been adopting resolutions on the subject every year since 1997. The Assembly, through its annual substantive resolutions, has highlighted the priority it attaches to the full and effective implementation of these visionary decisions which are universally applicable and sought after by the vast majority of all peoples in every nation.

The United Nations needs to be more than a fire brigade rushing in to put out the conflagrations and then withdraw from the scene without doing anything to ensure that fires do not break out again in future.

To put this in an appropriate perspective, let me underscore that interdependency of today’s world, if not addressed with sanity, can turn into a social, economic, nuclear or environmental catastrophe. The magnitude of these problems requires all human beings to work together in finding realistic, rational, reasonable and responsible solutions.

Most disturbing is that today’s atrocities often are directed to people living in the same community or neighborhood. Hatred and intolerance have blurred the vision of the perpetrators.
Great differences still exist between peoples and regions … the world is experiencing a new era of insecurity and uncertainty. Despite all our progress, too many people live in extreme poverty and hunger, do not have access to as basic things as clean water or food or education. Unfortunately worst-hit victims of this everywhere are the women and children.

The first step towards examining the road to peace should start with an understanding of the implications of these realities. The values of non-violence, tolerance and democracy which augment the flourishing of the culture of peace will generate the mindset that is a prerequisite for the transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace.

This I have seen first hand as my work took me to the farthest corners of the world. What I have seen has outraged me but also has given me hope and encouragement that there are forces who are determined to turn our planet into a livable place for all and where human dignity has taken strong roots. They are working hard to turn all the negative energies into positive ones so that every individual can realize her or his highest potential and live a secure and fulfilling life. I am always inspired by the human spirit and its resilience and capacity to overcome all adversity.

From Sierra Leone to Sri Lanka, from Mongolia to Mauritius, from Paraguay to the Philippines, from Kosovo to Kazakhstan, from Bhutan to the Bahamas to Burkina Faso, I have seen time and again how people – even the humblest and the weakest – have contributed to building the culture of peace in their personal lives, in their families, in their communities and in their countries. And that ultimately is contributing to building a new and better tomorrow for humanity and to the global movement for the culture of peace.

One lesson that I have learned from this is that to prevent our history of war and conflict from repeating itself - the values of non-violence, tolerance, human rights and democratic participation will have to be germinated in every woman and man - children and adults alike.

The need for the culture of peace is evident as we reflect on how our civilization has succumbed, from time to time, to the human frailties of greed, ambition and selfishness. We have seen that violence is often committed under the veil of public mandates when in fact those are the wishes of the few in power or who have power, be they economic, political, military, or even religious. It is therefore important and necessary that we take a close look at our approaches toward bringing peace to this world, to our communities and to each one of us as individuals. We have to find out where and why we went wrong. And, obviously, we have to find better ways to establish peace.

We need to remember that in the hate and violence filled 20th Century, we have seen the power of non-violence in the sacrifices of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Forces of hatred and intolerance claimed their lives…but not their souls, not their spirits.

We should not isolate peace as something separate or distant. We should know how to relate to one another without being aggressive, without being violent, without being disrespectful … without neglect, without prejudice. It is important to realize that the absence of peace takes away the opportunities that we need to better ourselves, to prepare ourselves, to empower ourselves to face the challenges of our lives, individually and collectively.

Here let me express with all emphasis my concern that continuing and ever-expanding militarism and militarization is impoverishing and destroying both our planet and its people.
In this context, another dimension is worthy of our particular attention. 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 deserve. I have seen this from close quarters as I traveled extensively in the poorest and most vulnerable countries of the world championing their cause in my last responsibility with the United Nations. Marginalization and abuse because of ethnicity, gender or religion, repression or bias, violence or intolerance are all closely linked to poverty and the concurrent lack of basic human rights. We must not forget that it is not only morally unsupportable but also practically unrealistic to achieve sustainable peace without addressing squarely the crushing problems of poverty and human insecurity.

Another pre-eminent concern that should get our attention is that the concept of security has for too long been interpreted narrowly as security of territory from external aggression and has been related to the concept of nation-states than to people. In this process, the legitimate concerns of common people and their perpetual quest for individual security in their daily lives are forgotten. End of cold war has brought to the forefront very clearly that many conflicts and their causes are within nations rather than between nations. For most people of the world, a sense of insecurity comes not so much from the traditional security concerns, but from the concerns about their survival, self-preservation and wellbeing in a day-to-day context. It is, therefore, absolutely essential that human security in a broader sense should receive priority attention of the international community. “Peace does not mean just to stop wars, but also to stop oppression, injustice and neglect”.

Another message comes out loud and clear that we should never forget that when women – half of world’s seven plus billion people - are marginalized, there is no chance for our world to get sustainable peace in the real sense.

While women are often the first victims of armed conflicts, they must also and always be recognized for their key role in the resolution of conflicts and reduction of violence. It is my strong belief that unless women are engaged in advancing the culture of peace at equal levels at all times with men, sustainable peace would continue to elude us. Here I would like to express my strong hope and expectation that the next Secretary-General of the United Nations is a woman.

As has been rightly said, without peace, development is not possible, and, without development, peace is not achievable … to that I would add that without women, neither peace nor development can be realised.

To turn the culture of peace into a global, universal movement, basically all that is needed is for every one of us to be a true believer in peace and non-violence, and to practice what we profess. Whether it is at events such as this, 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. Peace and non-violence should become a part of our daily existence. This is the only way we shall secure a just and sustainable peace in the world.

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asserted at the inaugural High Level Forum on the Culture of Peace in 2012 that “A key ingredient in building culture of peace is education. We are here to
talk about how to create this culture of peace. I have a simple, one-word answer: education. Through education, we teach children not to hate. Through education, we raise leaders who act with wisdom and compassion. Through education, we establish a true, lasting culture of peace.” This statement reiterates what the Programme on Culture of Peace wants to convey by putting “education” as the first among its eight action areas. The Secretary-General’s Global Education First Initiative launched in 2012 is aimed at giving every child the chance to attend school, to have quality education and thereby to strengthen their core values to become true global citizens.

All educational institutions need to offer opportunities that prepare the students not only to live fulfilling lives but also to be responsible and productive citizens of the world. For that, educators need to introduce holistic and empowering curricula that cultivate the culture of peace in each and every young mind.

Indeed, this should be more appropriately called “education for global citizenship”. Such learning cannot be achieved without well-intentioned, sustained, and systematic peace education that leads the way to the culture of peace. I am encouraged that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development adopted by the UN last September includes, among others, the culture of peace and non-violence as well as global citizenship as essential components of today’s education.

Let me conclude by urging all of you most earnestly that we need to encourage the young people to be themselves, to build their own character, their own personality, which is embedded with understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity and in solidarity with rest of humanity. We should do everything to empower them in the real sense, and I feel that such empowerment is going to stay with them for life. That is the significance of the culture of peace. That is its essence. It is the process of changing each one of us so that each of us becomes the agent of peace. It is not something temporary like resolving a conflict in one area or between communities without transforming and empowering people to sustain peace.

Albert Einstein once said, "The world is a dangerous place to live, not because of the people who are evil, but because of the people who don't do anything about it."

The culture of peace should be the foundation of the new global society. In today’s world, more so, it should be seen as the essence of a new humanity, a new global civilization based on inner oneness and outer diversity.

Let us – yes, all of us, therefore, embrace the culture of peace for the good of humanity, for the sustainability of our planet and for making our world a better place to live.

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