

"BUILDING THE CULTURE OF PEACE "

ADDRESS

BY

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WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

13 NOVEMBER 2007

As we meet here, some of the worst violence is taking place against civilians, the magnitude and intensity of which we have not 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 and willingness 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 never forget 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.

As we embark on our journey for the twenty-first century, we envisage many promises within the grasp of humankind. We see immense possibilities. We have the power to change the world for the better. We have the technology and the wealth. With collective efforts and will, we can eliminate hunger, eradicate disease, fight malnutrition and poverty and create a fulfilling future for all. We pay tribute to human creativity and genius for the progress achieved by humankind. For all the advances made - in science, literature, arts, management and medicine - the human mind has played the pivotal role. It has 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, harbouring hatred and inflicting pain on fellow human beings. It is this side of the human mind that poses the gravest challenge for humanity. The challenge for us will be to prevent the human mind from becoming consumed by ignorance, fear, violence, fratricide and intolerance. We have seen in past century alone what these can do to undermine the progress of the human race. We have seen a culture of war and violence spread its venomous tentacles, threatening to destroy all that is good, moral and just.

The dawning of the new millennium gives us a scope to take lessons from our past in order to build a new and better tomorrow. One lesson learned is that to prevent history repeating itself, the values of non-

violence, tolerance and democracy will have to be inculcated in every woman and man - children and adults alike. All of you would have heard it many times, but I would like to quote from the UNESCO Constitution one more time because of its relevance and value: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed." As former Secretary-General of the United Nations and Nobel Peace laureate Kofi Annan has said, "Over the years we have come to realize that it is not enough to send peacekeeping forces to separate warring parties. It is not enough to engage in peace-building efforts after societies have been ravaged by conflict. It is not enough to conduct preventive diplomacy. All of this is essential work, but we want enduring results. We need, in short, a culture of peace."

The first step towards examining the road to peace should start with an appreciation of the changing nature of conflicts. Gone are days of war between states for conquest, extension of spheres of influence in the name of ideology. Today's world and its problems are becoming increasingly more interdependent and interconnected due to globalization and advancement of science and technology. Most disturbing is that often today's atrocities are directed to people living in the same community or neighbourhood. Hatred and intolerance have blurred the vision of the perpetrators. Interdependency of the world, if not addressed with sanity, can change into a social, economic, nuclear or environmental catastrophe. The magnitude of these problems requires all human beings to work together in finding new, workable, realistic solutions.

The need for a 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 heinous acts are often committed under the veil of public mandates when in fact they are the wishes of the few in power, be they economic, political, military, or even religious. At other times, atrocities are committed out of a mistaken fear of the unknown.

The efforts at peace and reconciliation have to be based on an understanding of this new reality. Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach built on trust, dialogue and collaboration. For that, we have to build a grand alliance amongst all, particularly with the proactive involvement and participation of civil society and young people. No social responsibility is greater nor task heavier than that of securing peace on our planet. As the great advocate for peace SGI President Daisaku Ikeda has

exhorted, "Path to peace has not been and will not be easy, but never be defeated".

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 and every one of us would have to contribute - collectively and individually - to build peace through non-violence. "Non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being" - as Mahatma Gandhi has said. Here I also join Martin Luther King Jr. in saying "At the center of non-violence stands the principle of love".

Why do I put such emphasis on culture of peace? Three reasons: First, it targets individuals. There cannot be true peace unless the mind is at peace. Second, it brings together all actors. In addition to States and international organizations, actions to promote culture of peace can be undertaken by parents, family, teachers, artists, journalists, students and community and religious leaders ... people from all walks of life. Third, it sets its goals not on the principle of eye for an eye but on tolerance, solidarity and dialogue to settle differences and heal wounds.

The paradox that we perceive in today's world is mind-boggling. On one hand, through the process of globalization, an irreversible trend toward a global village has been established, while on the other, divisions and distrust have increased. Progress in the fields of science and technology, trade and communications, has boosted global wealth to levels that seemed unreachable few decades ago. We can see immense possibilities. We have the power to change the world for the better. However, great differences still exist between peoples and regions -- disparities and inequalities have, over the years, only augmented, causing the world to enter into a new era of insecurity and uncertainty.

We are living in years when people fear deadly attacks by terrorists, suffer from genocide or massive violations of human rights carried out by, on many occasions, their own governments. Despite the great advances in science and medicine, millions are dying from HIV/AIDS and other diseases. Despite all the progress, too many people live in extreme poverty and hunger, or do not have access to as basic a thing as clean water, or education, or healthcare. Unfortunately, the worst victims in this everywhere are the women and children.

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. 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 and opportunity. 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. There will be no development without peace, and no peace without development.

In my view, two things are needed to achieve and sustain peace in the world and break the vicious poverty-conflict cycle:

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. This change in our mindset and inculcation of the culture of peace is a fundamental change in human nature.

In our conventional wisdom, differences are perceived to trigger confrontation and conflict - always and everywhere. I, however, believe differences are not a threat. It should be perceived as ever-energizing diversity that has fuelled human progress. 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. The flourishing of culture of peace will generate the mindset in us that is a prerequisite for the transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace. Culture of peace will provide the bedrock to support a stable, progressing and prospering world - a world that is finally at peace with itself.

The journey that we commenced into the new millennium will demand strength, dedication and sacrifice from each of us. We have to keep striving with all of our intellectual and spiritual energy and determination for a better world, based on principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, respect for diversity, dialogue

and understanding. And there is no doubt that the most effective way to make a difference, to bring a change is to work together, building on trust and collaboration among individuals, within the family, in larger communities, in our societies and, at the same time, also at global levels.

It is in this context, I take immense pride that our beloved and sometimes unduly maligned world body, the United Nations, has been at the forefront in building a culture of peace throughout the world. The adoption in 1999, by the UN General Assembly, of the Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace was a watershed event. It was an honour for me to Chair the nine-month long negotiations that led to the adoption of this historic, norm-setting document that is considered as one of the most significant legacies of the United Nations that would endure for generations.

The UN's work has been particularly bolstered by the broad-based support of civil society. We are now in the final years of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non Violence for the Children of the World, proclaimed by the United Nations. This Decade covering the period 2001 to 2010 is spearheading a global movement for culture of peace.

A key ingredient in building culture of peace is education. Peace education needs to be accepted in all parts of the world, in all societies and countries as an essential element in creating a culture of peace. To meet effectively the challenges posed by the present complexity of our time, the young of today deserves a radically different education – “one that does not glorify war but educates for peace, non-violence and international cooperation.” They need the skills and knowledge to create and nurture peace for their individual selves as well as for the world they belong to. Peace studies should be incorporated in all educational institutions as part of their curricula, and should become an essential part of our educational process as reading and writing.

We should all mobilize support in our own spheres of activities for peace education. In this context, I would encourage you to support the Global Campaign for Peace Education which was launched in May 1999 by a highly-respected global non-governmental organization based in New York - the Hague Appeal for Peace. You should remember that peace education does not simply mean learning about conflicts and how to resolve them peacefully. It should also involve participation of young people in expressing their own ideas and cooperating with each

other in order to eliminate violence in our societies. In its essence, peace education as articulated by the Hague Agenda encourages reflection, critical thinking, cooperation, and responsible action. It promotes multiculturalism and values of dignity and equality. Their campaign rightly emphasizes that "...culture of peace will be achieved when citizens of the world understand global problems; have the skills to resolve conflicts constructively; know and live by international standards of human rights, gender and racial equality; appreciate cultural diversity; and respect the integrity of the Earth. Such learning cannot be achieved without intentional, sustained, and systematic education for peace."

Let us remember that the work for peace is a continuous process. Each of us can make a difference in that process. I am confident that you will make every effort to rid yourselves and your fellow men and women of the evils of intolerance and prejudice, ignorance and selfishness that compel us to repeat the cycle of violence. Only then, the world will be a better place to live for us, for our children and for our grandchildren. The seed of peace exists in all of us. It must be nurtured, cared for and promoted by us all to flourish. Peace cannot be imposed from outside; it must be realized from within.

As the great apostle of peace Mahatma Gandhi has said, "We must be the change we wish to see."
