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Nobel Laureates and UNESCO Work Together for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence

New York, September 4 - The Appeal of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates for a Decade for the Culture of Non-Violence, 2000-2010, and the UN Economic and Social Council's request to the General Assembly to proclaim 2000 the International Year for the Culture of Peace are coming together in the Assembly's 52nd Session, which begins September 16.

A dozen Member States have requested that this Session places on its agenda a separate item entitled "Towards the Culture of Peace". The General Assembly would formulate a Declaration and a Plan of Action for the establishment of the Culture of Peace on the basis of elements presented by UNESCO.

The goal of these initiatives is to incorporate the culture of peace and non-violence, long advocated by UNESCO, into the central vision of the UN's peace-building efforts.

At a press conference today at UN headquarters - moderated by Nina Sibal, Representative of UNESCO to the UN - Nobel Peace Prize laureates Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who won the award in 1984 for efforts to end Apartheid in South Africa, and Mairead Corrigan-Maguire, who was cited in 1977 for her role in seeking an end to violence in Northern Ireland, spoke of the campaign they and other laureates have launched to promote education for peace and non-violence - a key component of UNESCO's program "Towards a Culture of Peace." An audiotaped message by Aung San Suu Kyi, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991 for her pro-democracy efforts in Myanmar, was also played.

"As we enter the third millennium, the problems of ethnic and religious conflicts we are facing cannot be solved by war. We need to build new political and social structures and democratic institutions," said Ms. Corrigan-Maguire. "We abolished slavery and colonialism. We can abolish war, but we have to learn the ways of non-violence. Children are not born violent. It is something they learn, so they can learn the ways of non-violence."

Ms. Corrigan-Maguire paid a warm tribute to Princess Diana and a minute of silence was observed. She said the best way to remember the princess would be for the governments of the world to agree to ban land mines.

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Archbishop Tutu recalled that during the height of the campaign against apartheid, it seemed that South Africa "was going to explode into the most awful conflagration." But the blood bath didn't happen, he continued, because the international community "was committed to ending that evil system and forced the sides to talk, to see what was so obvious - that it is better to talk and seek accommodation than to kill. If it can happen in South Africa, why can't it happen everywhere else?"

"To be indifferent to the needs of children is to be indifferent to our own future. To help a child build a healthy and secure life is one of the best contributions we can make to peace," Aung San Suu Kyi said in her message.

"I am very happy that Nobel Peace Prize laureates blessed this initiative" to place the culture of peace and non-violence on the General Assembly's agenda, said Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN and one of the sponsors of the item. "We want to make peace inseparable from culture."

Ambassador Ricardo Castaneda-Cornejo, Permanent Representative of El Salvador and a long-time sponsor of the culture of peace initiative in the UN, told the press conference that UNESCO's Culture of Peace Program has been effective in assisting his country's reconciliation efforts after the end of the civil war and is still as relevant as ever to his country.

Several Nobel Peace laureates, including those present today, have signed an appeal for a culture of peace and non-violence that was sent last May for endorsement to all heads of state/government, as well as to heads of United Nations agencies. Director-General Mayor is among the UN leaders who have endorsed the appeal, saying it shares the same objectives as UNESCO in seeking to build peace.

Noting that non-governmental organizations are also strongly supporting the laureates initiative, Pierre Marchand, Secretary-General of the Appeal of the Nobel Peace Prize Laureates said "civil society is extremely happy with this. They all agree, the culture of peace and non-violence is the way."

"A culture of non-violence is truly possible," stated Lou Ann Guanson, vice president of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). "We must take responsibility for changing the culture. Join us in making the culture of peace and non-violence possible." She added that IFOR would be taking an active role in promoting appeal of the laureates worldwide.
