
BANGLADESH

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**Culture of Peace :
A Universal Concept at the World Body**

KEY NOTE ADDRESS

BY

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INTRODUCTION

As we enter the last year of this millenium, we pay tribute to human creativity and genius for the progress achieved by mankind. 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, harboring hatred and inflicting pain on fellow human beings. It is this side of the human mind that will pose the gravest challenge for mankind. 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 this century alone what these can do to undermine the progress of the human race. We have seen war, intra-state conflicts, endemic violence and social strife, We have seen ignorance and fear erode values. We have seen worst forms of intolerance in racism and xenophobia. We have seen widespread deprivation, conflict over scarce resources and suppression of human rights. We have seen a culture of violence spread its venomous tentacles threatening to destroy all that is good, moral and just.

The dawning of the new millenium 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 defences of peace must be constructed." The flourishing of 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. Culture of peace will then provide the bedrock to support a stable, progressing and prospering world - a world that is finally at peace with itself.

CULTURE OF PEACE AT THE UNITED NATIONS

The United Nations will begin the millenium on the right note. It will observe the year 2000 as the International Year for a Culture of Peace and the following decade as the Intemational Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-

violence for the Children of the World. The Secretary-General, in consultation with the Director General of UNESCO, have already presented a draft Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace which, I hope, will be adopted by the current session of the UN General Assembly.

Indeed, it seems to me that the concept of culture of peace is receiving wide acceptance and support. Through the efforts of the UN and especially, the UNESCO; through projects implemented nationally and regionally; through declaratory statements by regional organizations; through symposiums and workshops held all over the world; and through widespread involvement of the civil society, the idea is gathering more and more momentum.

At the meeting of the Administration Committee on Coordination (ACC) held last October, the Executive Heads of the UN Agencies agreed that the concept or the culture of peace was at the heart of the United Nations system. They decided to launch the International Year for the Culture of Peace at all United Nations system headquarters and field offices on the International Day of Peace in 1999.

I would like to mention here that the picture was not as encouraging as it appears today. Indeed it took a lot of effort and persistent negotiations to come to the point where we can say with confidence that the idea has taken off. In today's speech, I would like to mention the key moves at the United Nations that generated support for and increased the acceptability of the concept. In this connection, I would like to recall with appreciation the forward-looking support rendered by Secretary-General Kofi Annan to the culture of peace initiative. I would also like to pay a special tribute to the role of UNESCO and especially, the visionary leadership of its Director General Federico Mayor in shaping and articulating the concept of culture of peace. His energy and enthusiasm has been truly inspiring. I hope his involvement in the activities relating to culture of peace continue to broaden in the coming years.

Before the fifty-second session of the UN General Assembly) culture of peace used to be a sub-item of the item on human rights questions and was dealt with by the Third Committee of the General Assembly. The first-ever UNGA resolution on culture of peace 50/173 in 1995 was, in effect, limited to the UNESCO transdisciplinary project entitled "Towards a culture of peace", Next year's General Assembly resolution was broader in its scope, but still focused primarily on the Project. That year in the Third Committee, we wanted to make specific references to the broader concept of culture of peace to

promote it at the United Nations, but some delegations had a lot of difficulty with that. We realized that the two resolutions in the Third Committee, though adopted through consensus, were devoid of much substance and were not helping the promotion of the concept at the United Nations. It was obvious that without stronger initiatives, the concept would not get wider applicability.

At that stage, it was realized that the only way some of the misperceptions about culture of peace could be dispelled was to bring it out of the fold of human rights questions so that it could have its own independent standing. We found that the best way to provide a push to the concept would be to make it a separate item of agenda of the plenary of the Assembly. We mobilized support among interested countries and on behalf of twelve countries, Bangladesh wrote to the UN Secretary-General on 31 July 1997 asking for the inclusion of a supplementary item entitled "Towards a culture of peace" in the agenda of the fifty-second UNGA session. On 19 September 1997) the General Assembly decided to include a separate item entitled "Towards a culture of peace".

At the fifty-second session, Bangladesh took the initiative of presenting to the plenary of the General Assembly on behalf of fifty countries the draft resolution on culture of peace, which was approved by consensus. We took advantage of the presence in New York of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh in introducing the draft resolution. In his introductory statement, he mentioned and I quote: "As we struggle to address a multitude of problems that transcends borders, a culture of peace and harmony as opposed to war, violence and conflict could provide the foundation for a meaningful alliance for global action. The promotion of the concept at the national level in every society to forge better understanding and harmony among various groups, and at the bilateral, regional and international levels will only serve to compliment existing efforts and programmes with similar objectives. Similarly, we believe, actions to promote a culture of peace by the United Nations system could also be complimentary to other UN efforts, including peace-keeping, disarmament, development, human rights and advancement of women." The resolution contained a request to the Secretary-General, in co-ordination with the UNESCO Director General and taking into account the debate in the General Assembly and the specific suggestions of Member States, to submit a draft declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session.

At the same session, the UN General Assembly adopted a separate resolution proclaiming the year 2000 as the International Year for the Culture of Peace. Earlier at its substantive session in July 1997, the Economic and Social Council had adopted a resolution recommending the General Assembly to do so.

In 1998, Bangladesh was honoured to pilot the draft resolution entitled "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010)" at the substantive session of ECOSOC in July on behalf of 52 other co-sponsoring countries. This initiative emerged from the Appeal for the Children of the World of the Noble Peace Laureates issued in May 1997. After the first draft was submitted, the European Union and the United States made a number of comments and observations. Bangladesh delegation held consultations and discussions with all concerned to arrive at a consensus text. The resolution was adopted through consensus and recommended the General Assembly to proclaim the period 2001 to 2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World.

At the fifty-third session of the General Assembly a resolution was adopted through consensus proclaiming the period 2001 to 2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World, as recommended by the ECOSOC. After its adoption, the President of the General Assembly mentioned that history would record that that was perhaps the single most important decision the international community took, in securing international peace, cooperation and development in a structured manner for future generations to come.

The UN Secretary-General also submitted to the current UNGA session a consolidated report containing a draft declaration and programme of action on a culture of peace. The consolidated report was prepared in accordance with resolution of 1997 and contains recommendations that we believe are valuable, action oriented and will contribute to the global spread of a culture of peace. As the introduction of the report says, "in a rapidly changing world characterized by the growing importance of ethical issues, a culture of peace provides future generations with values that can help them to shape their destiny and actively participate in constructing a more just, humane, free and prosperous society and a more peaceful world."

The consolidated report was the focus of discussion when the plenary held debate on the item 31 : Culture of Peace on 10 November 1998. Bangladesh initiated the discussion on the item. Our statement focused on what culture of peace aimed at and how its promotion would benefit the spread of non-violence and contribute in peace building, development and protection of human rights in the next millennium. The key role of the United Nations, and in particular, that of the UNESCO was recognized in promoting culture of peace. Bangladesh also held that the culture of peace can be chosen very appropriately as an over-arching theme for the proposed Millennium Assembly in the year 2000.

The discussion at the plenary was very positive and supported the early adoption of the draft documents at the current session of the General Assembly. In summing up the meeting, the President of the General Assembly informed that Bangladesh would coordinate consultations on a draft resolution on this item for the adoption of the draft documents at a later date.

Accordingly, Bangladesh held the first round of informal consultations on 2 December 1998. At the consultations, a number of delegations expressed their appreciation of the draft documents submitted by the Secretary-General and strong support for their adoption without further delay. Some delegations including those of the European Union held that they needed to further examine the documents and would like to have more time. In view of that it was decided that delegations would seek the views from their respective capitals and would provide written comments by 7 January 1999 so that further informal consultations could be scheduled in January 1999. Before I left New York, I was informed that EU would need a little bit more time to submit its comments.

The fifty-third session of the General Assembly also approved a follow-up resolution on the International Year for the Culture of Peace, 2000 as recommended by the substantive session of the ECOSOC in July 1998.

The President of the General Assembly spoke enthusiastically on culture of peace at the World TV Forum held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in November 1998. He mentioned that culture of peace could be the overarching concept that can unite us in our struggle for a peaceful and harmonious world.

At the recent Security Council meeting on the maintenance of peace and security and post-conflict peace-building on 16 December 1998, I mentioned, "International peace and security can best be strengthened, not by actions of states alone, but by men and women through the inculcation of a Culture of Peace and non-violence in every human being and in every sphere of activity. The elements of a culture of peace draw from age old principles and values which are respected and held in high esteem by all peoples and societies. The objective of a culture of peace is the empowerment of people. It contributes effectively to the overcoming of authoritarian structures and also exploitation, through democratic participation. It works against poverty and inequality and promotes development. It celebrates diversity, advances understanding and tolerance and reduces inequality between men and women. We regard the culture of peace as an effective expedient to minimize and prevent violence and conflict in the present day world. Over countless millenia humankind has 'failed to abolish or do away with war. Indeed persons of the eminence of Noble Laureates Lester Pearson and Bertrand Russell have expressed the view that some people may even be thrilled at the prospect of war. What is clearly needed, therefore, is, as the eminent American philosopher, William James, said decades before the United Nations came into existence, the moral equivalent of war, something that would be as heroic to people as war has often been depicted to be, but also compatible with the essential human spirit which war emphatically is not. This is the need that the culture of peace strives to fill."

LOOKING AHEAD

I believe that the most significant development of culture of peace within the United Nations system would be the adoption of the draft declaration and programme of action by the General Assembly. The United Nations will then have a clear set of recommendations and proposals to build on. It will also provide Member States guidelines to undertake programmes and activities at the national level. As I mentioned earlier, we shall continue our efforts to ensure that the documents are adopted by this session of the General Assembly.

The Millennium Assembly is another forum where culture of peace should be highlighted. As the Assembly will be a milestone in United Nations activities and is expected to provide valuable inputs for its future course, it is only appropriate that culture of peace should find a prominent place in the

celebrations. I have already noted that it can be an appropriate theme for the Millennium Assembly, At the informal discussion of me plenary on the Milienium Assembly, I proposed that the culture of peace could be an appropriate theme of the Assembly, Additionally, the UNESCO can consider organizing a global forum on this occasion that will bring together from all over the world writers, painters, musicians, teachers, Nobel Peace Laureates, and representatives from the governments and civil society. They can share experiences and ideas and can learn from each other and use this learning in their respective field of work.

I believe that the steps we shall be taking at the United Nations will contribute to the universal acceptance and promotion of culture of peace. We hope that the draft Declaration and Programme of Action will be adopted by the 1999 International Day of Peace. International and national action can then translate the goals of the Declaration and Programme of Action into reality through the observance of the International Year on the Culture of Peace in the year 2000. And finally, the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World will result in further consolidation of the idea and its universal acceptance and application.

Before I conclude, I would like to draw your attention to the critical role of the civil society in the promotion of culture of peace: Given its cross-cutting nature, it will be greatly effective if a 'grand alliance' of everybody working in different but related fields could be forged to generate grass-roots support for culture of peace through advocacy and action. Our ability to involve all actors of the civil society in the coming years would make or mar the initiative for culture of peace.

CONCLUSION

Let me end on a note of guarded optimism. The time of culture of peace has come. It is no longer an idea, it is now a movement. But that only means we have crossed the first hurdle. The rest of the journey will take us to our streets where millions are without shelter; to our schools where children are denied proper education; to our communities where poverty is endemic and harmony exists only in hope; to our societies where discrimination and exclusion is still the order of the day; but most importantly, to every human mind to rid them of the evils of intolerance and prejudice, ignorance and selfishness. Only then, our movement would have achieved its objective. Only

then, we shall have a culture of peace that will inspire a truly universal value system.

In conclusion, let me once again state that we owe UNESCO a deep debt of gratitude for shaping culture of peace and pursuing it with diligence and tenacity. Many thanks to Director General Mayor for his pioneering role. Culture of peace will be his legacy to future generations and our tool to forge a better world for our children to inherit.
