

## **Keynote Address**

**By**

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**Former Under-Secretary-General  
and High Representative of the United Nations;  
Founder of The Global Movement for  
The Culture of Peace (GMCoP)**

**at the**

**Ashland Global Peace Conference  
on  
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**Ashland, Oregon, USA**

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**Happy International Day of Peace to you all!**

**Happy Anniversary to ACPC – Ashland Culture of Peace Commission!!**

**It is a distinct honor to be invited as the keynote speaker at the Ashland Global Peace Conference, organized by the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission (ACPC) in this pretty city. I would thank David Wick and Irene Kai, two good souls, for their tireless efforts to ensure that this commendable first-ever initiative on the International Day of Peace is successful in every possible way.**

**As I have stated on many occasions, my life's experience has taught me to value peace and equality as the essential components of our existence. They unleash the positive forces of good that are so needed for human progress. Peace is integral to human existence —**

**in everything we do, in everything we say and in every thought we have, there is a place for peace. We should not isolate peace as something separate. 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.**

**This I have seen firsthand as my work took me to the farthest corners of the world. What I have seen has given me hope and encouragement that there are forces which are determined to turn our planet into a livable place for all. 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.**

**The essence of the culture of peace is its message of self-transformation and its message of inclusiveness, of global solidarity, of the oneness of humanity. These elements—individual and global, individual to global—constitute the culture of peace. We should know how to relate to one another without being unpleasant, without being violent, without being disrespectful, without neglect, without prejudice. We need to focus on empowering the individual so that each one of us becomes an agent of peace and nonviolence. We just have to leave our own mark on this world as peaceful individuals.**

**When we see what is happening around us, we realise the urgent need for promoting the culture of peace - peace through dialogue - peace through non-violence. 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 culture of peace begins with each one of us – unless we are ready to integrate peace and non-violence as part of our daily existence, we cannot expect our communities, our nations, our planet to be peaceful. We should be prepared and confident in resolving the challenges of our lives in a non-aggressive manner.**

**The United Nations Charter arose out the ashes of of the Second World War II in 1945. The UN Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace emerged in 1999 in the aftermath of the Cold War. The adoption of this document has been our most significant achievement at the United Nations promoting the culture of peace.**

**Two decades have passed by since 13 September 1999 when the United Nations adopted by consensus and without reservation a monumental document “United Nations Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace” that transcends boundaries, cultures, societies and nations. It was an honour for me to Chair the nine-month long, arduous open-ended negotiations during 1998-99 that led to the agreement on this historic norm-setting document that is considered as one of the most significant legacies of the United Nations that would endure generations. I introduced the agreed text of that document (A/RES/53/243) on behalf of all Member States for adoption by the Assembly. Through this landmark adoption, the General Assembly laid down humanity’s charter for the new approaching millennium.**

**This document explains, outlines, and defines everything that the international community has agreed on as the focus of the culture of peace. I would always treasure and cherish that the opportunity to lead the process in its adoption and in its subsequent advocacy. For me this has been a realization of my personal commitment to peace and my humble contribution to humanity. For last two decades, my**

**focus has been on advancing the culture of peace and I have continued to devote considerable time, energy and effort to do that.**

**Very significantly this document articulates that the "culture of peace is a process of individual, collective and institutional transformation ..." 'Transformation' is of the most essential relevance here. The Programme of Action identifies eight specific areas which encourage actions at all levels – the individual, the family, the community, the national, the regional and, of course, the global levels. 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.**

**To accord an enhanced profile to the concept of the culture of peace, since 2012, successive UNGA Presidents convened an annual UN High Level Forum on The Culture of Peace to provide an inclusive, participatory platform for UN Member States, civil society, media, private sector and other interested parties to exchange ideas on the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action.**

**Last December, UNGA adopted a resolution to observe the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of this historic document in "an appropriate and befitting manner" on 13 September 2019 the exact date of adoption twenty years ago through the UN High Level Forum on The Culture of Peace to be convened by the President of the General Assembly. That happened Friday before yesterday.**

**I want to underscore one particular aspect in this context. In the culture of peace movement, we are focusing more attention on children because that contributes in a major way to the sustainable and long-lasting impact on our societies. A child's tendency toward either violent aggressiveness or nonviolence begins to take shape as**

**early as age four or five. Never has it been more important for the next generation to learn about the world and understand its diversity. The early childhood development and the task of educating children and young people to find non-aggressive means to relate with one another is of primary importance.**

**As Maria Montessori had articulated so appropriately, those who want a violent way of living, prepare their young for that; but those, who want peace have neglected their young children and adolescents and that way are unable to prepare them for peace. However, the last decades of violence and human insecurity should lead to a growing realization in the world of education today that children should be educated in the art of peaceful, non-violent, non-aggressive living.**

**UNICEF has taken the lead by integrating many elements of the culture of peace into its work, including with the Early Childhood Peace Consortium (ECPC) formed in 2013. In response to this realization, the sixth High Level Forum in September 2017 focused on the theme "Sowing the Seeds of the Culture of Peace: Early Childhood Development is the Beginning" and that attracted high profile attention from the UN community.**

**In recent years, we have seen some increase in engagement on the culture of peace. The culture of peace as an expression is being referenced more and more in political and civil society statements. At this point, let me quote what former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan had famously said underscoring the need for the culture of peace: *"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, the culture of peace."***

**The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with 17 global goals mentions in Goal 4 on education that all learners should acquire knowledge to promote, among others, the "gender equality", "culture of peace and non-violence" and "global citizenship".**

**Civil society has done the most to advance the cause in which the Global Movement for The Culture of Peace (GMCoP) has taken a lead in developing a coalition of civil society organizations and work with various actors promoting the culture of peace. Individuals, as the core of civil society, have also done a lot, especially as educators at all levels. I have great pleasure teaching "The Culture of Peace" as a learning cluster course at Soka University of America in southern California regularly since 2009. The same university has taken the lead in 2014 by launching an event, called "Dialogue on the Culture of Peace and Non-Violence," held every year on the UN-proclaimed International Day of Non-Violence on 2 October which is also the birth anniversary of the apostle of non-violence Mahatma Gandhi.**

**An essential message that I have experienced from my work for the culture of peace is 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. 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.**

**As I reiterate time and again, women bring a new breadth, quality and balance of vision to a common effort of moving away from the**

**cult of war towards the culture of peace. Women's equality makes our planet safe and secure.**

**As I always say emphatically - "Without peace, development cannot be realized, without development, peace is not achievable, but *without women, neither peace nor development is possible*".**

**Last March, it was very encouraging to know firsthand from ACPC's leaders David Wick and Irene Kai about their determined and committed collaboration, since the inception of the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission as a local-global initiative, to co-create an on-the-ground, practical, and evolving local Culture of Peace. I was impressed by their work in developing Ashland as a City of Peace, thereby developing an inspiring at the same time practical and workable model that other cities and civil society entities can learn from. I along with GMCoP encourage and support this brilliant endeavor by ACPC. My co-activists at the United Nations who interacted with ACPC leaders have particularly welcomed it. I believe ACPC's work with the UN will provide the needed experience-sharing opportunity.**

**ACPC has shown its creative "local-globalism" by installing the iconic symbol of peace - the World Peace Flame Monument - in Ashland which is inspiring the younger generation to inculcate the culture of peace in each one of them - both individually and collectively. Its "Keep The Flame Lit" campaign would be a constant reminder to the children and their guardians to do that. Yesterday I was at the World Peace Flame in Ashland. I spoke with the young students gathered there from the Ashland Middle School and was impressed by their dedication and enthusiasm to cultivate the culture of peace in their individual lives. It was truly inspiring to see the students taking care of the upkeep of the World Peace Flame on a regular basis. It was a**

**pleasure for me to present on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Culture of Peace a certificate to these students individually in appreciation of the service for the culture of peace as a Flame Keeper.**

**I believe very strongly that to realize its vision, in the coming years ACPC should plan on introducing the culture of peace at schools in collaboration with the teachers in creating an opportunity for children in the community to grow up with a positive, non-violent mindset. This does not have to mean necessarily a change in the formal educational setup. It would mean that while acquiring their knowledge through regular education, students should understand the value of having a peaceful and non-violent attitude in every aspect of their lives as they grow up. In this scenario where family plays a major role, ACPC can provide an opportunity for parents and teachers to support each other in this effort.**

**I extend my whole-hearted encouragement to ACPC in its efforts in creating the local-to-global and global-to-local pathways for advancing the culture of peace. Consider me as a friend!**

**Let me conclude by asserting that 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 conferences and 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.**

**Let us remember that the work for peace is a continuous process. Each one of us can make a difference in that process. Peace cannot be imposed from outside; it must be realized from within.**



**Let us 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 for all.**

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