

**Keynote address by
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and
Founder of the Global Movement for The Culture of Peace (GMCoP)**

**at the celebration of the
International Day of Peace 2024
on the theme “Cultivating a Culture of Peace”**

**organized by
The Brahma Kumaris
at Fordham University, Bronx, New York City
on Saturday 21 September 2024**

I am delighted to convey to you all my warm celebratory greetings on the observance of International Day of Peace today and on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the Culture of Peace!

For all peace-loving people of the world, the month of September is particularly meaningful as it includes two dates of global significance for peace – the International Day of Peace on the 21st, preceded by the anniversary of the Culture of Peace on the 13th.

At the outset, let me proudly say that civil society has become the main motivator world-wide for the observance of the International Day of Peace – as showcased by this gathering.

This afternoon’s event is being offered by The Brahma Kumaris, a civil society organization globally admired for the centrality of the spiritual focus of their work. The Fordham University’s hosting of the event deserves our whole-hearted appreciation.

The United Nations has invited all nations and peoples to observe the International Day of Peace as a day of global ceasefire and non-violence, and to honor a cessation of hostilities for the duration of the Day. It also urged all to commemorate the Day through education and public awareness.

This year’s observances assume a special importance as the Culture of Peace marks its milestone 25th anniversary and the IDP2024 honors that by choosing “Cultivating a Culture of

Peace” as its theme. I believe this offers us the opportunity to make International Day of Peace meaningful through building the Culture of Peace.

The UN Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace emerged a quarter century ago in the aftermath of the long-drawn Cold War. That inspirational act took place on 13 September 1999. As Bangladesh’s Ambassador to the UN, it was an honor for me to Chair the nine-month long negotiations that led to the adoption of this historic landmark document by consensus by the United Nations General Assembly.

Simply put, the Culture of Peace as a concept, as a motivation means that every one of us needs to consciously make peace and nonviolence a part of our daily existence. We should know how to relate to one another without being aggressive, without being violent, without being disrespectful, without neglect, without prejudice.

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.

The culture of peace begins with each one of us. We always say emphatically “Let There Be Peace on Earth, and Let It Begin with Me”. 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 for and confident in resolving the challenges of our lives in a non-aggressive manner. In today’s world, more so, the humanity’s creed should be based on inner oneness and outer diversity.

For that, one of the things we can do on a daily basis is to embrace the oneness of humanity and connect with the global community to show love, respect, care, and appreciation for each other.

To paraphrase Mother Theresa who lamented saying that the greatest disease today is not cancer, it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. She said that we can cure physical diseases with medicine, but the only cure for despair and hopelessness, hatred and prejudice, violence and conflict is love and compassion. Drawing attention to a different kind of poverty –

poverty of spirituality, she said “there are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love”. What a profound pronouncement!

Often, I am asked how the UN is doing in the implementation of the Programme of Action adopted by the General Assembly in 1999. I believe that the Organization should own this norm-setting document adopted by its General Assembly and fully internalize its implementation throughout the UN system. Also, the Secretary-General should prioritize the culture of peace as a part of his leadership agenda. He – or she, as we campaign for his successor would be a woman - should make good use of this workable tool that the UN possess to advance the objective of sustainable peace.

In addition to the role of the UN leadership, let me end by outlining the four integrated mainstream action for the coming years bolstering the global movement for the culture of peace.

Number one is of course education - Education for global citizenship.

If our minds could be likened to a computer, then education provides the software with which to “reboot” our priorities and actions for transition from force to reason, from conflict to dialogue.

Number two: meaningful equality and participation of women.

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 conceivable.*”

Number three: youth and children.

It is essential to recognize the empowerment of young people as a major element in building the culture of peace. Young people of today should embrace the culture of peace in a way that can not only shape their lives but can also shape the future of the world. For this, I believe that early childhood affords a window of opportunity for us to sow the seeds of transition to the culture of peace from an early life.

And Number Four: Key role of the Cities and the Communities.

I believe very strongly that cities have the potential to shape the future of humankind and to win the battle for sustainable peace and development. And the culture of peace is a handy and useful tool for that.

Way forward

I continue to emphasize that The Culture of Peace is not a quick fix. It is a movement, not a revolution! Peace is not just the end of war or conflict. Real peace means also the end of discrimination, prejudice, injustice, and inequality.

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.

Let us remember that the work for peace is a continuous 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.

One voice creates a ripple – many ripples make a wave – collectively, our voices for the Culture of Peace can transform the world.
