



THE WORLD MUST BUILD A CULTURE OF PEACE

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By Anwarul Chowdhury (*)

NEW YORK, Jan (IPS) On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, in December 1998, a group of civil society organisations launched a global campaign for the universal recognition of the human right to peace. They called upon all “to prevent violence, intolerance, and injustice in our countries and societies in order to overcome the cult of war and to build a Culture of Peace”.

Both of these high aspirations remain elusive.

In today’s world, the culture of peace should be seen as the essence of a new humanity, a new global civilisation based on inner oneness and outer diversity. The flourishing of a 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. A culture of peace will provide the foundation for a stable, progressive, and prosperous world for all.

The adoption in 1999 by the United Nations General Assembly of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace was a watershed event. Nine months of negotiations which I had the honour to chair led to the adoption of this historic, norm-setting document now considered one of the most significant and enduring legacies of the United Nations.

The UN’s work has been particularly bolstered by the broad-based support of non-governmental organisations. We are now in the final stretch of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, which was proclaimed by the United Nations. This Decade (2001-2010) is galvanising a global movement for the culture of peace.

The international community should assert that there is no more crucial social responsibility or more pressing task than securing sustainable peace on our planet. Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach built on trust, dialogue, and collaboration. For that, we must build a grand alliance for the culture of peace amongst all, particularly with the proactive involvement and participation of the young people. This is the first priority as we look ahead.

The second area we need to concentrate on is giving long-overdue recognition to the fact that women also have a major role to play in promoting the culture of peace, particularly in strife-torn societies, and in bringing about lasting peace and reconciliation. Unless women are in the forefront of this culture of peace, long-term solutions will elude us. Women have proved again and again that it is often they who foster the culture of peace by reaching out across divides and encouraging others to do likewise.

The third crucial focus is peace education, which must be accepted in all societies and all countries of the world as an essential element in creating culture of peace. To effectively meet the complex challenges of our time, the young of today deserve a radically different education -one that does not glorify war but educates for peace, non-violence, and international cooperation. All educational institutions need to prepare students to be responsible and productive citizens of the world to introduce teaching that builds the culture of peace.

Explicit recognition of the human right to peace by the Human Rights Council and by the UN General Assembly should be the fourth area of focus.

In addition, civil society has a major role to play in the full and effective implementation of the Culture of Peace Programme of Action, particularly in holding national governments and relevant international organisations accountable for their commitments.

The seeds of peace exist in all of us, and they must be nurtured by all of us -individually and collectively- so that they flourish. Peace cannot be imposed from outside; it must be generated from within.

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