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Sixty-sixth General Assembly
High-level Forum
on Culture of Peace (AM & PM)

**GENERAL ASSEMBLY CONVENES HIGH-LEVEL FORUM ON 'CULTURE OF PEACE', WITH
EDUCATION,**

**YOUTH OUTREACH, WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT HIGHLIGHTED AS KEYS TO MORE
PEACEFUL WORLD**

**Secretary-General: Through Education We Can Teach Children Not to Hate;
Round Tables: Building Partnerships; Advancing Action Programme Implementation**

With the world's people exhausted from war and angered by short-sighted Government policies that padded military budgets and gutted social programmes, senior United Nations officials and eminent peace advocates today opened the High-level Forum on a Culture of Peace stressing that education, youth outreach and women's empowerment were the keys to wiping out poverty, injustice and exclusion.

"When we look at the suffering in our world, we know how urgently we need a culture of peace," Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, opening the first-ever General Assembly high-level forum on the topic, citing troubling events in today's headlines; from the fighting in Syria that was taking a deadly toll on civilians, to Mali, where sacred sites in the legendary city of Timbuktu were under attack, and the terrible attacks in Libya and elsewhere where a "disgusting film" appeared to have sparked violence.

"At a time of tension, we need calm," he said, adding that senseless violence — even in countries not at war — was taking too many lives. The world's people were crying out for a culture of peace. They intuitively understood that there could be no military solution to conflicts and that the planet's scarce resources should be spent to help people flourish, not cause more suffering. Indeed, the \$1.7 trillion spent last year on weapons was an enormous cost to people who went to bed hungry. "Economists call this an 'opportunity cost'. I call it a moral outrage," he said, declaring: "We need a culture that upholds human dignity and human life."

The Secretary-General's call was echoed throughout the day-long event, in a moving address during the opening ceremony by General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser and statements by special guests Federico Mayor, President of the Foundation for a Culture of Peace, and Cora Weiss, President of the Hague Appeal for Peace. Eileen Lin gave a musical performance and key delegations that supported the convening of the Forum made

statements. The event also featured two panel discussions, respectively, on building partnerships to promote a culture of peace, and advancing implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action on a Culture of peace, adopted by the Assembly in 1999. At the end of the day, Mr. Al-Nasser strongly recommended that the Forum be convened every year on 13 September, the day the Programme had been adopted.

"We are here to talk about how to create this culture of peace. I have a simple, one-word answer: education," Secretary-General Ban continued, stressing that through education children could be taught not to hate and leaders could be taught to act with wisdom and compassion. He announced plans to launch a new global initiative next week — "Education First" — which would aim to give every child a chance to attend school, strengthen core values and receive a quality education. "Governments must lead, but ultimately a culture of peace will be built by people: teachers, religious figures, partners and community leaders and grass roots groups all joining together to denounce violence and demand peace," he said.

In his opening remarks, Assembly President Al-Nasser said that a culture of peace was a set of values and attitude based on the principles of freedom, respect for diversity, and solidarity, as well as dialogue and understanding. Declaring that spreading such a culture was most critical to today's world, he said: "If we are to come out of the shadows of conflict and make a new beginning, all members of society must be inspired by the culture of peace."

He went on to note the significance of stepping up implementation of the Programme of Action, which, he said, outlined a comprehensive, inclusive approach in specific actions areas, from bolstering education to enhancing tolerance and solidarity, and including international peace and security. The Programme also rallied a broad array of partners around a culture that set goals based "not on the principle of an eye for an eye, but on tolerance, solidarity and dialogue to settle difference and heal wounds." He backed the Programme's strong focus on education and stressed that if the culture of peace was to "take deeper root [...] we will need to reach out more effectively to the younger minds as they grow."

"The youth of today deserve a radically different education — one that does not glorify war but educates for peace," he said, calling for education that focused on peace, non-violence and understanding. Another area that needed focus was giving long overdue recognition to the fact that women had a major role to play in promoting a culture of peace and bringing about lasting reconciliation. "The cause of peace needs to be understood not only in the passive sense of the absence of war, but also in the constructive sense of creating conditions for equality and social justice," he said, calling on all delegations to truly believe in peace and "practice what we profess".

Mr. Mayor began his address reciting the opening lines of the United Nations Charter, and stressed that while the oft-repeated phrase "we the peoples" had been wisely chosen to frame the Organization's founding document, "the bloody history of male absolute domination" along with moves by powerful countries to weaken the United Nations with their veto, had undercut the post-war dream of peaceful co-existence. Indeed, security had trumped all and a culture of conciliation and alliance had been disregarded in favour of a culture of violence and war.

"We the peoples urgently need to [remake] the United Nations into a truly democratic multilateral system," he declared, stating that just as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

had provided guidance to a newly-fledged United Nations more than 65 years ago, it was now time to craft a Universal Declaration of Democracy to Chart the world body's future. "It's here, in this hall, that this historical shift can take place — from force to words and from weapons to dialogue — towards a United Nations system with the moral authority and the security forces needed to redress so many urgent situations," he said.

Further, the Organization should be rebuilt without veto power resting in a few powerful nations, but with well-weighted voting procedures through which "the peoples" of the Charter — the General Assembly — were equitably represented. He also called for the creation of a "security council" on the environment, and another, dealing with economic issues. "We are in the only international institution that could start this new beginning, the way towards a world of equal human dignity for all," he said, echoing the Assembly President's call for renewal and urging a recommitment to the Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace and acceleration of its implementation as a way to jump start such a change.

When Ms. Weiss took the floor, she said that the recipe for a culture of peace had many ingredients, including education that incorporated "peace education" and equality between women and men. Further, the Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women, peace and security needed to be fully implemented, for without women's presence in the peace process, decisions would be ineffective. "Subservience undermines democracy," she underscored.

Turning to the threats that undermined efforts to a Culture of Peace, she pointed out that, among others, poverty was a form of violence that could be prevented and cured. The environmental damage of extracting hard-to-mine resources led to corruption and the displacement of people. Military spending and weapons proliferation and their ensuing "bloated military budgets" soaked up funds for human security. Acknowledging that nations had the right to defend themselves, she questioned the \$1.7 trillion used to prepare for war, calling it indefensible and in conflict with United Nations goals and priorities.

However, she said, there was progress as well, commending, among others, the new visa agreement between India and Pakistan, the peace talks between the Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia and Columbia to take place in Oslo, and the Global Network of Women Peace Builders that worked to implement localization training of resolution 1325 (2000) in six countries. In this regard, she commended the Global Network's "bottom-up approach" to policymaking which brought mayors, police, tribal leaders, teachers, and women together to learn how to adapt the resolution.

Urging several steps towards achieving a Culture of Peace, she called for the adoption of a convention on nuclear weapons, a more robust Arms Trade Treaty and a new Security Council resolution on children, youth and peacebuilding. When citizens of every nation attained the skills to resolve violent conflict and live by international standards of human rights, gender and racial equality, then a Culture of Peace would be achieved. "Imagine how your country can benefit," she told delegations, "and what you can do to help foster it.

At the end of the opening ceremony, statements were made by delegations that had supported and contributed to today's event, including Bangladesh, Benin, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Kazakhstan, Philippines and South Africa. Representatives commended the convening of the first ever high-level forum on the topic as well as the work of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) which, as the delegate of the

Philippines stated, had been promoting a culture of peace since the 1990s.

Several speakers drew attention to wars and conflicts within their own countries. Recalling the 30 years of internal strife in Guatemala, that country's delegate lauded the progress made in the 15 years since the Peace Accords had been signed. However, changing the mindset and attitudes of people took time and "deliberate" efforts, which his Government sought through education, legislation and public policy.

Benin's representative, echoing an African Head of State, emphasized that "peace is not a word, but a behaviour", and it needed to be pursued with determination, as "there were many things that could happen on the road to peace." In 1999, his country had experienced unrest and violence and it was 10 days of dialogue that had spared Benin war and put it on the road to democracy.

Noting that his country had produced four Nobel Peace Laureates, the delegate of South Africa highlighted key components of his country's foreign policy, which focused on creating stability and conditions for sustainable development in Africa and promoting the African Agenda. A culture of peace was not just the absence of war between and within nations, he underscored. It required a profound socio-cultural and economic transformation to "render peace rather than war as an attractive alternative".

Wars still existed, Costa Rica's representative said, but rarely between nations. Rather, they were between groups that "turned proximity into hostility", and where the "other" could be suddenly classified as "the enemy". Rueing the fact that negotiations on an arms trade treaty continued to be mired in politics, he said it was a "sombre moment for peace and human dignity". Quoting Emerson, he said, "Peace cannot be achieved through violence; it can only be attained through understanding."

Summing up the day's events, Deputy Secretary-General Jan Eliasson said Mr. Al-Nasser, whose tenure wraps up Tuesday, had been one of the most active Presidents the Assembly had ever had. Indeed, he had continually stressed the importance of culture, peace and dialogue. Mr. Eliasson said the participants in the day's events — diplomats and civil society partners and youth representatives, all working together — were a blueprint for creating the culture of peace. Indeed, he had always believed that diplomats would never succeed if they worked in a cultural vacuum; broad cultural interaction and understanding generated peace. Moreover, education could not be passive in the face of the needs of the day — children must be given the chance to build global citizenship and promote a culture of peace.

Recalling that the international community would next week commemorate the death of former United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld, he said the renowned diplomat had been the embodiment of the twin concept of culture and peace — "his diplomatic side could not be separated from his passion for culture." Indeed, Mr. Hammarskjöld had been a dynamic diplomat because he had immersed himself in cultural activities. By way of conclusion, Mr. Eliasson said that without peace there was no development and without development there was no peace. Moreover, without respect for human rights and the rule of law there was neither lasting peace nor sustainable development. As such, he urged work on all those tracks towards a better world for all, based on a culture of peace. "Nobody can do everything, but everybody can do something and you in this room are proof of that," he declared.

Panel I: New Partnerships, New Developments

Moderated by Paulette Bethel, Permanent Representative of the Bahamas to the United Nations, the panel featured presentations by: Judy Cheng-Hopkins, Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office (PBSO); Lakshmi Puri, Assistant Secretary-General, United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women); Philippe Kridelka, Director, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), New York Office; Mario Lubetkin, Director General, Inter Press Service; and Christine Mangale, Programme Coordinator for Africa, Lutheran Office for World Community.

Opening the panel, Ms. BETHEL said the challenges to establishing the culture of peace persisted amid violence and human rights violations that daily spilled across the globe. The international community owed it to the victims of such abuse to meaningfully carry out the undying vision of a culture of peace. The mission was to make the culture of peace the dominant and prevailing culture. Indeed, today's discussion was especially timely, as Member States could candidly reflect and build on momentum from the International Decade for the Culture of Peace (2001-2010) and ensure all equally necessary partners were working side by side: Governments, civil society and academic.

Ms. CHENG-HOPKINS reminded the audience that the United Nations had been founded to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war. Its tools to achieve that goal had evolved considerably, from diplomacy and peacekeeping operations to humanitarian and development assistance. The Organization was increasingly integrating its operations and there was a growing recognition that without peace, there could be no development, and that without development, peace would not last. The 2005 creation of the United Nations new peacebuilding architecture — the Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Support Office and Peacebuilding Fund — more deeply anchored that vision.

In seven years, those bodies were finding their niches, she said, and there were signs that the Commission was making a difference. In Sierra Leone, for example, it was supporting efforts to deepen democracy by strengthening State institutions. In Yemen, the Fund had helped lay the foundation for peace by facilitating the first democratic presidential election. The partnership between those in Government and those being governed was the most critical partnership of all, she said, which was seen in consolidated institutions, adherence to the principles of accountability and rule of law, and the creation of State bodies that delivered services and benefits to people.

Next, Ms. PURI said the culture of peace was critical to all aspects of the United Nations goals to achieve human rights, peace and security and sustainable development around the world. Gender equality was critical to realizing such a culture and was a "force multiplier" to those three endeavours. "Women and girls are the biggest peace constituency around the world [numbering] 3.5 billion," she said. Their role was not only a matter of numerical logic; it was measure of the propensity for peace. They were facing the brunt of violence in their homes, at work and in conflict and post-conflict situations.

She went on to say that women and girls were driven by a vision of nurturing and providing for future generations. "This makes them a major contributor in any campaign against violence", she insisted. Harnessing their agency, economic empowerment and organization was the best way to bring about peace. "We must create an enabling environment", she said. To

improve women's leadership and political participation, UN-Women was supporting national electoral processes, electoral law reforms, constitutional reforms and the adoption of special temporary measures so women could take charge of the destiny for peace. Gender justice and women's agency was at the core of the culture of peace.

Mr. KRIDELKA said that, in 2011, the UNESCO General Conference adopted a new Programme of Action for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence, which built on experience and ongoing reflection processes. The International Decade had also provided an impetus for peace around the world, with its call for commitment and responsibilities addressed to individuals and communities, as well as non-governmental, Governmental and international organizations. Challenges remained, however, amid persistent conflict, violence and exclusion — in old and new forms.

He went on to say that the new Programme of Action aimed to create paths to “everyday peace”. In that context, UNESCO would mobilize all its sectors, deconstruct preconceived ideas and promote a global movement favouring non-violence. For example, it was working on a “History of Africa” project with ministries of education to ensure that African history was presented by African historians in schoolbooks. “We are proud of that,” he said. In a “slave route” project, UNESCO was cooperating with delegations of the Caribbean, Africa, the United States and the European Union— as well as with various ministries of education — to develop school books and preserve heritage. Other efforts focused on cultural diversity. “This is the renewed foundation on which UNESCO is working to disseminate a culture of peace,” he said.

Speaking next, Mr. LUBETKIN recalled that, in 1999, the General Assembly proposed supporting the media, press freedoms, social communication, and measures to stop media violence. Thirteen years later, the international community could clearly affirm that the values and ideas the Assembly had proposed in 1999 were still completely valid. In recent years, communication on the culture of peace had evolved. “We’re in an interactive horizontal process in which citizens can act to break the barriers of monopoly [held by] the media,” he explained. Millions of people around the world had joined the communications process and social media would play an even greater role in the future.

In that context, he explained that partnerships could not be thought of exclusively in terms of media. “We’re in a new phase in which the media, civil society and international organizations must play a part,” he said. Inter Press Service, born nearly 50 years ago, today was proving it was possible to focus on the culture of peace to better communicate on a global level. Its strong growth in recent years offered proof that millions of people were concerned about such issues. Media outlets reproduced its news. “We’re optimistic,” he said. Ideas needed more and better communication. Inter Press Service was building awareness about the culture of peace in partnership with multiple actors that were faithful to that mission.

Rounding out the panel, Ms. MANGALE said she was a youth leader in Nairobi when the International Decade was launched and had learned about the Decade through her church. By working through her congregation, she realized she had the energy and creativity to build a culture of non-violence, in partnership with the ecumenical movement and Lutheran church, which had provided humanitarian assistance for more than six decades. Against that backdrop, she said youth were central actors, yet were often ignored. Youth rallies had been effective in helping young people embrace a culture of peace. Her organization brought young people together for three-day rallies to advance harmony, promote cultural exchange and foster community building. They

offered a safe space to break cultural stereotypes.

She said youth peace summits at the regional level had also helped young people build skills and draw attention to international commitments, which often were made in New York.

Describing a visit to a site of the Rwandan genocide, she said the experience had been transformative, both for herself and other young participants. "We renewed our commitment to non-violence," she said. Young people must know how to access resources and demand action from elected leaders to address their needs. There was a tendency to see youth labour as volunteerism and she urged the United Nations to allocate resources so young people could sustain themselves in dialogue. She also recommended partnerships between religious youth, Governments companies and civil society. "We are the Mandelas," she said. "We are the Ghandis. Let us better enable each of us to realize our potential to be peace promoters, peacebuilders and peace makers".

When the floor was opened for questions and comments, one delegate stressed that today's discussion was aspirational in nature and encouraged the panel to detail concrete activities that addressed the root causes of conflict. Indeed, racism and racial discrimination, resource exploitation, and the use of small arms and light weapons had given rise to atrocities such as rape and amputation. He pressed the United Nations to shift the focus from war crimes, to "crimes of war".

A civil society representative, who said her organization had held workshops for youth at the United Nations for years, asked the panel for ways to use the Internet to unify people working to create a culture of peace. Another civil society representative asked about dealing with gender injustice. "Who are the advocates one can call," she asked.

Responding, Mr. LUBETKIN said culture of peace was a process. "We need to connect different actors," he said.

Ms. PURI said she supported criminalizing violence in all its forms and doing away with any culture of impunity. A range of actions was needed. For its part, UN-Women was addressing women, peace and security at the programmatic level. Its approach was to "build back better" by establishing new norms, enabling environments and policies. Changing the mindset of governance structures, such as law enforcement, was also important. It was critical to work with and foster civil society. The "power of possibilities" must also be conveyed to women and girls.

Ms. CHENG-HOPKINS said the Peacebuilding Commission, Peacebuilding Support Office and the Peacebuilding Fund all were carrying out concrete activities to build and maintain a culture of non-violence. In Sierra Leone, for example, the United Nations had invested in non-State actors to bring about a vibrant democracy and helped to create a women's alliance to push through legislation on issues such as maternal health.

Mr. KRIDELKA noted that the Broadband Commission would meet next week in New York. UNESCO was working on the content of that meeting to ensure the culture of peace was reflected. He stressed the importance of listening carefully to civil society.

Panel II: A dvancing Implementation of Programme of Action

Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Senior Special Advisor to the President of the General Assembly and former United Nations Under-Secretary-General, moderated the panel, formally titled "Strengthening the global movement, advancing the implementation of the United Nations Programme of Action on Culture of Peace: the way forward". Panelists included: Avon Mattison, President, Pathways to Peace; Cherine Badawi, Coordinator, Generation Waking Up; Jeff Abramson, Director, Control Arms Campaign Secretariat; Maria Butler, Peacewomen Project Director, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom; Sharon Deep, Spokesperson, Global Movement for the Culture of Peace; and Philip Hellmich, Director, 2012 Summer of Peace, the Shift Network.

Ms. Mattison said the Annual Day of Peace on 21 September was a trigger for concerted consciousness. Paraphrasing philosopher Nicholas Rourke, she said that a peace pact had emerged between the two World Wars that conflict would no longer be solved by violence. He had said that where there was peace, there was culture, and where there was culture, there was peace. "It is really time," said Ms. Mattison, to expand awareness of the Action Programme.

She said that, as today's event was webcast around the world, everyone was sitting within a global community. Pointing out that the Declaration and unanimous resolution that established the International Day in 1981 was aimed at committing to peace "above all differences", she said it was time to recommit at all levels to building that culture of peace for present and future generations. Even a "small call to action" for the upcoming "peace day" would make a difference in the quality of "our lives, our institutions and the planet's future".

A culture of peace was within reach, declared Ms. Badawi, describing herself as a first-generation Arab who had grown up in Greensboro, North Carolina. She had been the only Arab in her class. Her schoolmates had made fun of her lunch "reeking of garlic", and called her "Cher-fro" instead of "Cherine". Back in Egypt, cousins made fun of everything American about her, from her plucked eyebrows to her outspokenness — for a girl. Thus began her efforts to become "part of the mighty wave of humanity amid a culture of peace". She said there were messages of hope, but also of great despair, poverty and violence, but young people, nevertheless, believed peace was possible as never before. "We are waking up to our interconnectedness and coming to understand that our well-being is inextricably linked to all life on Earth and to each other."

With that, she said it was essential to "write a different story together". Building a culture of peace was humanity's response to the "disease" of our time. Young people on every continent were already "living the story" and embodying the culture. She shared some initiatives created by people in their 20s and 30s, including a programme of young Israelis and Palestinians living together in a desert and learning to "navigate conflicts together". So many were tired of the fighting. In Zimbabwe, a young girl had convinced her mother to give her 30 acres of the family farm to create a "learning village", where the youth did such things as harvesting rainwater and calling together circles of elders to build community. She also pointed to a city revitalization project in Brazil called "Warriors without Weapons". Her generation was waking up, and each person committed to a culture of peace must become a master storyteller in order to amplify what is true and possible.

Mr. Abramson agreed with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon that the world was over-armed and peace was underfunded, that \$1.7 trillion in military spending was a moral outrage. The trade in weapons, said Mr. Abramson, was "out of control", in the \$50 billion to \$100

billion range. So-called conventional weapons included everything from fighter jets and battle ships to handguns. Some \$8.4 billion in small arms and light weapons were traded, although much of it was not tracked. Bananas and agricultural products had global regulations; weapons did not. It was indeed “mind-blowing” that the most dangerous thing in the world had no international trade agreement. As Mr. Ban said on 3 July, “that’s a disgrace”.

He said the coalition he represented was one of more than 90 alliances and organizations in more than 150 countries. West Africa, alone, had 300 organizations. The group had spearheaded the “Million Faces” Campaign in 2006, which eventually won the support of a vast number of countries. In 2009, the United States and others had agreed to negotiate an arms trade treaty, leading to the four-week conference that had occurred in July “one door over”. However, no such treaty resulted. Civil society wanted to see all arms transfers regulated, but by July, the United States and others said they were not yet ready; the treaty text had been introduced only the day before.

Nevertheless, he said, that text would likely be the basis for future negotiations, but right now it had numerous loopholes. For example, it did not include the full scope of ammunition and the various prohibitions it did contain needed to be clarified. Those included a ban on arms transfers “for the purpose” of war crimes or genocide. The First Committee (Disarmament and International Security) would take up the discussion, but there, the drive for consensus was the lowest common denominator and civil society was left out of the “conversation”.

Adding to that, Ms. Butler said two key aspects central to peace and freedom were demilitarization and gender equality. Fear and violence were not part of the culture of peace she supported. Women’s organizations in the Middle East and North Africa talked about arms on their streets and the discrimination they faced in their work. Last December, a young girl she knew had been an unarmed peaceful protester in Cairo, but when she saw a young woman in a blue bra in Tahrir Square having had her clothes ripped off her by military personnel, she went to her aid. For that, she had been beaten into a coma, and only recently, had recovered from her injuries. Today, the young woman was not talking about hate or revenge, but about justice and accountability, about uncontrolled military brutality and its impact, whether in Syria or Gaza, and elsewhere around the world.

Noting that the United Nations Charter called for the least investment in arms, she said peace activists could not be silent on the issue of military spending. Instead, they called for a reinvestment in education, development and equality. The spending on nuclear weapons and their modernization was in the billions; that was not an investment in the culture of peace. The arms trade treaty text that emerged in July simply was “not good enough”. Loopholes allowed countries to “contract out of saving lives”. Plus, it did not have strong enough provisions to prohibit sales of arms to countries where human rights were being violated or where gender-based violence was perpetrated. She said the commitments made to the women, peace and security agenda must be implemented by all actors and holistically. She highlighted nine peace agreements, in which only two provisions contained a section on women, peace and security, and, of 14 peace processes under way last year, only four negotiating parties had included a woman.

Mr. Hellmich said he had lived in Sierra Leone before, during and after the war, and had seen the impact of the arms trade and culture of violence on his loved ones. The Summer of Peace celebrated peacebuilders around the world and inspired, informed and involved people —

“from the inner to the international” — across multiple pathways and sectors in society. “Tele-summits” had taken place every hour of every day, “like a wave of peace around the world”, through which young people said “yes, we can, and we will”. His group was training the peacebuilders and had created a framework through which people could share what they were doing and issue calls to action. Those peacebuilders had said they had felt isolated. Now, they were part of a large community. There was a “culture of peace emergency” among people around the world. Even scientists and economists had learned that human beings were “hard-wired for compassion and love”.

He said he was convinced that the human spirit would “rise up and express itself”. All that was needed was to “tap into our humanity and listen to it”. Together, he said, a “global symphony” was being created. “We have to be the change we want to see; we have to be peace,” he urged. If countries listened to each other with respect, there would be a lot less violence. Many peacebuilders knew it was not possible to move forward without looking back and reconciling the ills of the past. He encouraged participants to access the website: declarationofcommitment.com.

Ms. Deep said “we all sleep with the Declaration and Programme of Action under our pillows”. She thanked Ambassador Chowdhury and the outgoing General Assembly President for partnering with civil society. From their efforts, the way forward towards a culture of peace had become clearer. If everyone practiced the “voice of good will” in their homes, the workplace, schools, towns and communities, their leaders would practice it too. “Some of us are raising our flags,” she said, as participants around the room raised the flags of their country, calling on their leaders and ambassadors, past and present and future, to join them. “We’re together here on a land that belongs to no one nation, but to all nations.” The world was just beginning to tap into the collective power needed to create a global movement for the culture of peace. “There ain’t no power like the power of the people ‘cause the power of the people won’t stop,” she concluded.

The representative of Malaysia opened the discussion that followed, highlighting the many initiatives on interfaith and inter-civilizational dialogue in which his country had participated. “One thing that active participation in these events has taught us is that all religions and faiths deplore violence and extremism,” he said, remembering the call made by his Prime Minister at the Assembly’s sixty-fifth session to rally peace-loving people worldwide to stand for what they believed, in order to drown out the voices of the extremists.

Next, a survivor of the genocide in Rwanda stood up and described how she had lost her parents, grandparents, uncle, “auntie”, cousins and big sister. “Why do I exist,” she said she often asked herself. The flag of Rwanda would be raised on the International Day as a sign of the country’s resilience. Her personal quest was to heal young girls and women and help them to overcome the fear of a lack of power. She asked the panel how social media could be used to send out the messages from today’s forum.

Ambassador Chowdhury said those who used Facebook should send out hundreds of short messages about how today’s forum had inspired them.

Then, five youths took the floor on behalf of the “International We Love You Foundation” to describe their organization’s initiatives and the positive changes that had resulted. Another participant stressed that peace should be included in the Sustainable Development Goals. She also suggested the Decade of Peace should continue.

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