

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

## Building Bridges of Peace

*In conjunction with UN International Day of Peace – A public program organised by Brahma Kumaris Malaysia*

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ADDRESS BY

**Mr. Youssef Oomar**

UNICEF Malaysia Representative

Yang Berbahagia Dato' Mohammad bin Mohd Daud

**Deputy Secretary General**

**Ministry of Unity, Culture, Arts & Heritage**

Dr. Nirmala Kajaria

**Director of Brahma Kumaris for Asia & Pacific Region**

Mr. Letchumanan Ramatha

**President, Brahma Kumaris Malaysia**

**Your Excellencies,**

**Distinguished guests,**

**Ladies and Gentlemen.**

Good evening and Selamat Petang to you all.

### UNICEF's role globally and nationally

Please allow me to thank Persatuan Brahma Kumaris Raja Yoga Malaysia for organising this program to commemorate the UN International Day of Peace which was on 21 September, and for inviting UNICEF to be a part of this.

UNICEF is the UN agency tasked with responding to the needs of children. Since 1954, we have been working with the Government, civil society and young people in Malaysia to give children the best start in life.

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We use our expertise and experience to influence decision makers about the importance of fulfilling children's rights, and to support them in meeting the challenges that face children and those who care for them.

We are guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which considers the child in his/her totality, as human beings and subjects of his/her own rights.

### The right to peace

*“Nonviolence is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind. It is mightier than the mightiest weapon of destruction devised by the ingenuity of man.” (Mahatma Gandhi)*

Every child has the right to an education, the right to health, the right to be treated equally, and the right to be protected from harm.

And of course, every child has the right to live in a peaceful society.

I fully agree with the words of Dadi Janki, the Administrative Head of Brahma Kumaris, who wrote that the call for peace is not just for an end to conflict, but for “a deep inner stillness and calm, which all souls remember as our original state”.

Without peace, children cannot have their other rights fulfilled. Without peace, children cannot even have a childhood – the kind of childhood that they can look back on with a smile on their faces.

Children do not start wars or conflict, yet they suffer the most. Death is only one end for these children. Millions of others live with injuries and disabilities. Some are conscripted, kidnapped and forced into becoming child soldiers or sex workers. Homes are destroyed, children are separated from their families and suffer from malnutrition, hunger, diseases, and psychological damage.

Even in a country like Malaysia, where there is no war, people hope and pray for peace. Because peace is not simply the absence of war – it is about fostering acceptance and compassion in our communities, promoting social integration, and establishing new

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structures of cooperation so that our children can grow up in a society that appreciates cultural diversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

### Building bridges of peace

Conflict arises when people cannot resolve differences in interests and ideologies, and they seek to exercise power over each other in ways that do not respect the rights and dignity of others.

But differences are what make us unique. Instead of warring over our differences, we should be celebrating them. Instead of letting them drive us apart, we should be building spiritual bridges of understanding, acceptance and friendship to close the gaps.

We should be talking about **peacebuilding**, not just “peacekeeping” or “peacemaking”. We should be building strong, stalwart and reliable bridges of peace – a long-term culture of unity and harmony that will not crumble under the weight of hatred or divisiveness.

There is peace in each and every one of us. We are all part of this long-term solution for peace.

Every individual can act peacefully and positively in their everyday lives. A personal act of kindness can trigger a chain reaction and inspire others to treat people with respect.

Schools can teach children positive values, such as respect for the rights of others; non-violence for conflict resolution; equality; as well as social cohesion and integration.

Communities can come together – regardless of race, religion and status – to share problems and solutions. Respected community leaders, such as elders and religious leaders, play an important role in providing a neutral platform to engage their communities in dialogue.

Governments can work towards eliminating the underlying economic and social causes of conflict, by striving for equitable development and distribution of wealth. As long as circumstances of poverty, disparity and injustice prevail, people will not be at peace.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

### Every day is a day for peace

We are here tonight because of International Day of Peace – a day devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples.

Anyone, anywhere can celebrate Peace Day. It can be as simple as lighting a candle, sitting in silent meditation or doing personal acts of kindness towards others. It can involve engaging your co-workers, organisation, community or government in a large event to demonstrate solidarity and unity.

It can, and should, go beyond just one special day – so that our children today and tomorrow can have the childhood they deserve.

In all their innocence, children see the world as their playground, the people as their friends. It is time that we see the world through their eyes and accept everyone in friendship, regardless of colour, caste or creed.

Thank you.