

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Building peace for children

At Malaysian Inter-Ethnic Goodwill Forum, in conjunction with commemoration of International Day of Non-Violence

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In today's world, we face many hostile forces -- multiple and persistent crises that demand a response from leaders and grass roots alike.

The United Nations works to end violence, and each year, we commemorate the International Day of Non-Violence on 2 October – the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, who helped lead India to independence and inspired movements for civil rights and freedom across the world.

The UN strives to end violence by calling for the end of weapons of mass destruction.

The call to non-violence need not apply only to the use of deadly weapons. The “human assault” on our planet must also stop, as we are causing irreversible damage to the Earth and it is our children who will suffer as a result of this.

We must also stop the appalling violence inflicted on women and girls throughout the world. An estimated 150 million women and girls are victimised each year, due to abuse at home and in the community, exploitation, as well as conflict.

Peace is not simply the absence of war. Peace is about creating and sustaining a long-term culture of peace, unity and harmony – not just in countries experiencing conflict, but all countries where people of diverse backgrounds, cultures and religions enjoy equitable development and live together in harmony.

Children and peace

Every child has the right to live in a peaceful society, so that they can have all their other rights fulfilled.

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Without peace, children cannot have access to education, healthcare and an adequate standard of living, or be protected from violence. Without peace, the very principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are violated.

Children are the most vulnerable victims of conflict and war. Death is only one end. Their rights are violated in so many ways, for instance, millions of children live with injuries and disabilities. Children are conscripted, kidnapped, press-ganged, terrorised, or otherwise forced into becoming child soldiers. Girls may be forced into sexual servitude.

Children are displaced from their homes and are exposed to violence, abuse, and separation from their families. Displaced children may have difficulty establishing their nationality or identity and may become stateless.

Children suffer from malnutrition, hunger, diseases, and psychological damage.

Respecting rights, achieving peace

Peace must be achieved so that children can have their rights fulfilled.

Conversely, we must also protect children's rights in order to achieve peace. A world without war can only be possible if today's children, all around the world, are given the opportunity to realise all their rights – to education, health, protection and equality.

Children who survive and thrive, who are healthy and well-educated, can learn values of respect and equality, become productive citizens, and become part of a larger society that is integrated, free and equal.

Building peace

We need to focus on the level of peacebuilding, which is different from "peacemaking" and "peacekeeping". Peacebuilding focuses on creating a long-term culture of peace, rather than solving existing conflicts or preventing old ones from re-occurring.

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Peacebuilding creates and maintains beneficial conditions that can sustain the social, economic, political and spiritual development of all peoples – through the construction of new environments and cultures, and the strengthening of new democratic institutions.

Peace-building efforts should foster tolerance and compassion in our communities, promote social integration, and establish new structures of cooperation so that our children can grow up in a society that appreciates cultural diversity.

Let us end violence in all its manifestations, and strengthen our collective work for a safer, greener and more peaceful world.

Thank you.