

21 September 2008

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
on the International Day of Peace**

The growing number of communities celebrating the International Day of Peace attests to peoples' deep yearning for a world at peace with itself. As a priest, I aspire to be both a messenger of peace and a peacemaker. As I assume my responsibilities as President of the United Nations General Assembly, I am acutely aware of the hopes and expectations that billions of people around the world place in the United Nations to put an end to war and senseless, man-made violence.

Contrary to popular perception, war and organized violence have declined dramatically over the past two decades, and the United Nations has its share of credit for this decline. But it is equally true that during this same period some of the worst violations against humanity also occurred, including the obscenity of genocide. Undoubtedly, the activism and advocacy of civil society through non-governmental organizations and individuals challenged this madness with varying degrees of success, and sought to restrain governments that seek to assert their power – military, economic and social – through any means.

Widespread violence persists and is all to present in today's world, whether overtly in wars of aggression and civil conflicts, or in the more hidden but equally lethal forms of structural violence that deny the poor their right to development. The only enduring way to overcome the logic of violence and its manifestations is to work with fervor to disable the tools used to wage war and replace the logic of "I" and "mine" with the logic of "we" and "ours". It means coming into full consciousness of our connectedness with the lives of others as well as with our planet and its resources.

It is fitting that International Day of Peace closely coincides with the opening of the new session of the UN General Assembly each September. This is when representatives of the 192 Member States gather to renew their commitment to work together in the quest for world peace, the eradication of poverty and to pursue the progressive advancement of human rights.

Let us pause to consider the enormous significance of a world at peace with itself. Consider the relevance Albert Einstein's commentary shortly after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi in 1948: "The future of mankind will only be tolerable when our course, in human affairs as in all other matters, is based upon justice and law rather than the threat of naked power as has been true so far."

I encourage you to use today as an opportunity to reflect on a fundamental truth: our common humanity and responsibility of solidarity towards all our brothers and sisters in need, whether they live next door or across the world. And I appeal to you, especially the young people of the world, to join the billions

of people who are dedicated to building a better world, and who believe that the logic of love and compassion have a place in world affairs.

We must never delude ourselves, or let others pretend, that Peace is merely the absence of war or some exalted state of impassivity. World peace will only be achieved through active resistance to all that negates and diminishes human dignity, and waging peace, is therefore, eminently political and oftentimes provocative. Today it means working for disarmament and nuclear control, not simply non-proliferation. It means applying the instruments available to us, in their full spirit, and complying with our international obligations, whether environmental, humanitarian, financial, economic or in the domain of human rights.

The United Nations remains at the centre of these efforts. Member States have committed themselves to the principles outlined in the UN Charter and to a growing body of international law. If governments, international financial institutions and corporations can each be made to comply with international and human rights obligations, world peace and security have a chance. I urge you to familiarize yourselves with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which marks its 60th anniversary on 11 December. It remains today as remarkable a document as when it was first adopted in 1948.

I urge you to examine and support UN efforts to bring peace to conflict ridden areas and to salute the UN's peacekeepers – over 100,000 soldiers, police and civilians around the world – who are deployed to keep the peace, prevent conflicts, and safeguard fragile peace processes. This year also marks the 60th anniversary of the UN's Blue Helmets. Familiarize yourselves with places and nature of these conflicts and seek to participate in their resolution, in ways large and small.

The development agenda of the Organization, given focus through the eight Millennium Development Goals, aims to drastically reduce extreme poverty around the world. But without peace, the MDGs will not be achieved by the target date of 2015. And for every impoverished family in the world, so too our hopes for peace are diminished. I appeal to you to learn about the MDGs and do your part to put an end to extreme poverty.

We, especially the young people among us, have the opportunity to use the technologies now available to advance world peace and promote awareness. We have the advantage of immediate communications that help us to inform, to protest, to organize and to press our leaders, at the community, national and international levels, to honor their commitments. I urge you to stay engaged.

This year, the United Nations is encouraging those of you with access to cell phones and the Internet to send your personal messages of peace to each other, to your government officials and to the General Assembly itself. As President of the General Assembly, I welcome your messages which are being sent to our dedicated website (peaceday2008.org). I look forward to reading your messages of support and advice and to give them to world leaders assembled here at the United Nations next week. Together we can build on shared aspirations for hope and peace – for all of us.