14 September 2015

Excellency,

I have the honour to transmit herewith a summary of the key messages and proposals from the High-Level Forum of the General Assembly on a Culture of Peace which I convened on 9 September 2015 at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Sam K. Kutesa

To All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

High-level Forum of the General Assembly on a Culture of Peace

New York, 9 September 2015

President's Summary

Introduction

The President of the General Assembly convened a High-level Forum of the General Assembly on a Culture of Peace on 9 September 2015. The purpose of the Forum was to provide an opportunity for Member States and other stakeholders to exchange views on this important issue and highlight emerging trends that impact on the implementation process of the United Nations General Assembly's 1999 Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. It was also aimed at recognizing the need for strengthening further the global movement to promote the Culture of Peace especially in the current global context.

Over the course of the Forum, speakers highlighted that the modern world is increasingly interconnected: socially, culturally and economically. Noting the concerning increase of acts of violence unfolding around the world, speakers emphasized the need to promote a worldwide culture of tolerance and reconciliation. In this regard, participants highlighted the important role of community and religious leaders, as well as the media.

The Forum consisted of a high-level opening plenary session with high-level representatives, and two interactive panel sessions where participants discussed several key issues focusing on the themes: "Promotion of the Culture of Peace in the context of the Post-2015 sustainable development agenda" and the "Role of media in the promotion of the Culture of Peace". Interventions and statements followed both interactive panels. A closing segment concluded the event.

Key messages

Throughout the day, many speakers highlighted that acts of violence unfolding around the world attest to the urgent need to promote the culture of peace. Peaceful resolution of disputes based on the UN Charter, international law and human rights is critical for the establishment of sustainable and enduring peace. Participants also underscored that the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies is a shared responsibility of the international community.

Participants stressed that the culture of peace cannot be achieved through laws and resolutions alone, but should include concrete steps from governments, civil society, community leaders, the private sector, the media, educators, parents and other stakeholders.

The following key messages and proposals emerged from the Forum. They are outlined below under the broad themes: sustainable development goals, education, media, youth and gender and vulnerable groups.

1. *Sustainable Development Goals:*

It was stressed that the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, to be adopted by world leaders in September 2015, includes goals that require the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies. Many participants welcomed the inclusion of Goal 16 and target 4.7 in the new development agenda, acknowledging the interlinkage between peace and security and development and emphasizing that the transformative agenda will be critical in fostering a culture of peace and in conflict prevention, resolution and peacebuilding endeavours. They stressed that achievement of human development would be difficult in situations of persistent inequality and lack of access to basic social services such as education. In this regard, they welcomed the ongoing reviews in peacekeeping, peacebuilding and resolution 1325, on women and peace and security, noting that all have underscored the importance of building and sustaining peace.

2. *Education:*

Many delegations underlined the importance of education in building a culture of peace, particularly the importance of promoting global citizenship education. Education plays a key role in promoting citizenship and the values of democracy, freedom and tolerance. Others pointed out that religious leaders must be more active in promoting respect among religions, particularly among young people. Speakers underscored that the culture of peace must take root and be cultivated from a very young age. In that context, many underscored the importance of education, saying that cultural diversity should be an essential pillar in school curricula. Delegations underscored the importance of establishing programmes at the national level that raise awareness of the need to foster tolerance as well as respect for cultural and religious pluralism and mutual understanding. These national programmes would be an important part of the future development agenda.

3. *Media:*

Many speakers stressed that the engagement of the mass media will be important for helping stakeholders promote a culture of peace, including the government in disseminating the values of peace to all people and eradicating the seeds of violence.

Participants further stressed that while the media can be a useful agent for promoting the values of mutual understanding and coexistence, it can also be misused for disseminating ideas that lead to misconceptions and stereotyping. In that regard, the international community must stand together and enhance its efforts for building peaceful and inclusive societies.

Participants also called for greater freedom of the press, saying it can be a vital contributing factor for building peaceful and inclusive societies. They also highlighted that when used in a positive manner, the media supports the promotion of knowledge, raises awareness and enhances interaction between peoples and civilizations.

4. *Youth and Gender and vulnerable groups:*

Many speakers stated that it is time to invest in young people as peacebuilders who could make considerable contributions to long-term stability. Therefore, efforts should be focused on eliminating discrimination and promoting justice and the rule of law. An advanced universal strategy to promote mutual understanding among all would be useful, in this regard.

Speakers emphasized the critical role that women and youth can play in the promotion of culture of peace. Participants called for the engagement of women in all spheres of life, including conflict prevention and resolution as well as reconstruction in post-conflict situations. Other participants underlined the importance of national ownership of the future development framework and the importance of establishing national programs that foster tolerance, promote respect for cultural and religious pluralism and encourage mutual understanding.

The importance of protecting minorities, including in mediation and reconciliation processes as a fundamental building block in the promotion of a peaceful world was also stressed. Participants also underscored the importance of the provision of humanitarian assistance to the most vulnerable, including victims of conflict and the protection of their human rights and fundamental freedoms. Many delegations also stressed the important role of community and government leaders in preventing the manifestation of violent conditions in their societies and countries.

A call to action:

It was observed that the concrete steps were needed to promote a culture of peace by governments, community leaders, parents and social workers, educators, journalists and civil society; both individually and collectively. They underscored that the culture of peace must take root from a very young age and be cultivated throughout lives.

In order to achieve sustainable peace and security, all Member States and stakeholders should be encouraged to promote the culture of tolerance and reconciliation.

It was noted that the Secretary-General would organize a high-level special meeting to promote a systematic approach to migrant and refugees flow during this year's high-level week.

Panel Discussion 1: "Promotion of the Culture of Peace in the context of the Post-2015 sustainable development agenda"

The panel discussion focused on strategies for fostering a culture of peace and the roles that specific actors and sectors of societies, such as educators, women and youth can play in promoting inclusive approaches to a culture of non-violence and peace, panelists and other participants stressed the importance of integrating the Culture of Peace Program of Action into the agenda.

Many participants recalled that since the adoption of the Programme of Action in 1999, its implementation has been crucial to promoting peace in all areas of development. In that context, they emphasized the essential role of civil society in this mission, including by helping to spread the message of peace on earth at the foundational roots of the United Nations. A common understanding between peoples is essential to creating the conditions for a sustainable peace. To this end, speakers underscored that multiculturalism, respect for diversity, pluralism of traditional identities and human rights must be promoted. It was noted that three religions; Islam, Judaism and Christianity all speak to the need for peace and understanding.

Referring to the strategies developed to promote the culture of peace in the context of the future development agenda, participants noted that the collective effort exerted by Member States to arrive at the 2030 Agenda and the Financing for Development can serve as a model for world-wide cooperation. They noted that the time was right to start thinking about the implementation of this agenda; underscoring that without peace, it would be difficult to achieve the global aspirations of a life of dignity for all humanity.

Many speakers underlined that although many are working diligently, more political will is needed to create a real and enduring peace.

Speakers also stressed that the three pillars of the United Nations; peace and security, human rights and development need to be strengthened. Participants also underscored the need to integrate global development aspirations into national plans.

Panelists underscored the importance of institutional reinforcement of the agenda through mechanisms that can measure the accountability of actions, at national and regional levels, resolving long-term transformation through partnership programs and responding collectively to the needs and challenges on the road towards implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

The panellists also underlined the serious challenges of poverty and hunger. In this regard, speakers urged countries to dedicate more resources to addressing development and economic issues, as well as environmental challenges.

Panel Discussion 2: "Role of the media in the promotion of the culture of peace"

The second panel discussion considered the various forms of media that could be used to foster tolerance and mutual understanding. Participants stressed that media can play a powerful role in changing the mind-set of people, including promoting tolerance and respect for others. All actors should come together to create greater public awareness of the issues involved. Participants also underlined the need for vigorous free and responsible press which will help create the conditions for more dialogue between peoples. Speakers advocated for more diversity among journalists, the promotion of women in leadership positions within media organizations and the need to highlight shared human values.

Speakers underlined that a critical problem the world facing today is that the media tends to focus more on acts of violence, rather than the peaceful resolution of conflict.

It was stressed that the media must lead a paradigm shift towards non-violence. Social media can have a key role to play, in this regard. Participants also emphasized the need to find more effective ways of releasing the power of media to advance social change. Some participants recommended to that the media commit to refraining from showing violent images on 21 September, the International Day of Peace.

Conclusion:

The event addressed a number of issues related to the promotion of the culture of peace. It also provided an opportunity to share personal experiences and draw lessons learned from States that have already put in place national initiatives, in this regard. Overall, participants underlined that peace requires equitable societies, inclusive education and tangible actions on the ground.

Furthermore, participants noted that this year's 16th anniversary of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace represents an important rallying point in collective efforts towards conflict prevention and resolution as well as peacebuilding efforts.