

Address by H.E. Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen, Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN in the High Level Forum on Culture of Peace scheduled to take place on 14 September 2012 at 10.00 am in the UN Headquarters, New York.

President of the General Assembly

Secretary General

Excellencies, Distinguished delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let me begin by expressing our appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this daylong first ever High-level forum of the General Assembly on the Culture of Peace. I am sure under your able stewardship today's deliberation would further strengthen our resolve to promote a Culture of Peace. I also thank Secretary-General for his valuable remarks.

I would like to applaud the active role of His Excellency Anwarul Karim Chowdhury, former Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN for his commitment and sustained efforts to the cause of Culture of Peace. I am also thankful to the civil society, who has been always supportive to this initiative.

Although more than six decades have passed the creation of the UN, the world has sadly witnessing the occurrences of wars and regional conflicts many of them led to crimes of genocide and crimes against humanity, thus harming the peace of the world. However, Peace is not mere absence of war. It has a broader connotation. There are also new threats to international peace and security, emanating from mindset of intolerance and hatred, from acts of terrorism, abject poverty, food insecurity and climate vulnerability. Against this backdrop, the UN adopted Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace in 1999 and subsequently the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence (2001-2010) was launched. Bangladesh played a humble role in this area. Each year we table a resolution on the Culture of Peace and I am pleased that it gets adopted through consensus. This once again shows that the global community is committed to global peace and stability.

A country born out of a heroic war and sacrifice of millions, Bangladesh greatly values principles of tolerance, dialogue, mediation, democracy, and understanding. The main essence of our foreign policy therefore, is "Friendship to all malice to none." These values are enshrined in the Declaration and the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. I am delighted to mention that the components of peace, democracy, social and religious tolerance, ethnic diversity and communal harmony, inclusiveness and justice for all are held high as the fundamental principles of the Constitution of Bangladesh.

The proliferation of ethnic, religious and civil conflicts has proven the manifested necessity of a global transition from a mindset of culture of war to a mindset of culture of peace.

A Culture of Peace can facilitate the emergence of universally-shared values, such as tolerance, in a world where war and conflict or fear of it continue to run rampant, and international terrorism and intolerance threatens the safety and security of humanity. It has enormous power to create a world order where amity would supplant atrocity, harmony would overcome hatred, and love and tolerance would replace prejudice and misunderstanding.

We believe that humanity, irrespective of the individual's culture, civilization or faith, share many common values. We should focus on those to build the bridges, close the gaps and fasten the links. I have no doubt that it would be in our collective interest to devote our resources and capacities, intellectual and material, in favor of this campaign.

It is high time that we should devote all our efforts to implement the program when the world is witnessing rampant violation of human and nation's rights, when peace has become more elusive in the society and across nations, where human life has become the cheapest of all commodities. In a spirit of inclusiveness, Bangladesh welcomes all views as to the implementation of the Action Plan. We also believe that participation of all actors – governments, international organizations, civil society, NGOs, young people, private sector, community leaders, religious leaders, teachers, artists, journalists, celebrities, humanitarian workers and more importantly 'media'– is essential to realize our universal goal of a peaceful world, a world where we would be able to solve our problems through convergence of ideas, rather than through confrontation, through soft diplomacy and mediation rather than through promoting enmity, hatred and intolerance.

While we promote a Culture of Peace and all such initiatives, we do not pretend that these objectives can be achieved in a vacuum. To make peace sustainable, it is imperative to create right conditions for our people to live in dignity and in freedom from want and fear, from hunger and poverty, from deprivation and discrimination, from exclusivity and injustice. All prevailing political, economic and socio-cultural injustices across nations must also be addressed. School children should also be taught the values of tolerance and diversity, and college curricula should include courses on it.

Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Peace and development goes hand in hand. World Bank report of 2011 amply proved the nexus between security and development. The UN has been responding to the call of distressed humanity and have been deploying troops in conflict ravaged areas. We are now putting more emphasis on peacebuilding. In this regard, let me share that Bangladesh is a founding member of UN Peacebuilding Commission and we are a leading country both in Police as well as troops contribution to the UN Peacebuilding Missions. We have also encouraged gender dimension to it and assisted the UN in implementing it by providing a complete contingent of women police peacekeepers to UN Peace Mission.

We are proud that we played our part for the UNESCO to adopt the 'International Mother Language Day' to preserve, protect and promote cultural diversity and native languages to enrich humanity and to be sensitive to diversity of cultures. We also tabled a resolution termed 'People's empowerment and development' a peace-centric model. This resolution entails seven interrelated components of peace, development and stability which the Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina designed and developed from her personal experience of long four decades of political career. We are thankful to all member states for their overwhelming support in adopting the resolution by consensus and we hope that the substantive form of the resolution will once again receive the same support and cooperation from all UN members during its negotiation in the upcoming 67th UNGA.

The present era of globalization has opened up the opportunities for greater cooperation, complementarities and the values of cultural diversity for mutual benefits. Increased connectivity

and exchange of values among civilizations can promote better knowledge and understanding. A spirit of tolerance and mutual understanding between all cultures is now more important than ever. The challenge before us is to turn the diversity of cultures, religions, languages, traditions and customs into assets. We need to seize this opportunity. The most effective ways to strengthen a global culture of peace is to focus on substantive engagement among nations and civilizations.

I look forward to that day when the UN, a credible tool for change will help create a global community where peace and stability would be guaranteed, and it would be free of dangerous weapons of mass-destruction, free of extremism and fundamentalist thoughts and actions, free of intolerance and hatred, and where different cultures, civilization and religions would coexist happily side by side, where human rights and rule of law, justice and fairness would prevail, where the strong would refrain from exploiting the weak and the marginalized. It is the pursuit of these noble goals that will lend our lives the dignity that we all seek and cherish. It is the pursuit of these noble goals that has brought us here to take an action plan for the betterment of teeming millions of the mother earth. It is the pursuit of these goals that we practice democracy, we practice rule of fair laws and justice, we devote ourselves in the service of God, we respect values, ethics and opinions of others and we don't block or kill others for their counter opinion and we try to resolve conflicts through peaceful means.

This is, not to speak the theme of this year's general assembly. Let's hope it will not only be a jargon in the paper, but will see its implementation under the guise of our Program on Culture of Peace. With that hope, let me conclude here by joining poet Tagore, Noble Laureate of Bengal:

Where the mind is without fear
Where the head is held high
Where the knowledge is free.....
Into that freedom of heaven, my father, let my country, awake.

I thank you all.
