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UN marks International Day of Peace with call to ‘make your voice heard’



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon rings the iconic Peace Bell

15 September 2011 –

The United Nations today marked the annual International Day of Peace with tributes to those working to build a better future as well as a call to people everywhere to make their voices heard to strengthen peace and democracy.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the International Day, which falls on 21 September. The theme for this year is “Peace and Democracy: Make your voice heard!” and today’s observance coincides with the observance of the [International Day of Democracy](#).

[Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon stressed that democracy is a core value of the UN, noting that it is crucial for human rights, provides channels for resolving differences, and gives hope to the marginalized and power to the people.

“But democracy does not just happen; it has to be nurtured and defended,” he said in a [message](#) to mark the Day. “The world needs you to speak out – for social justice and freedom of the press, for a clean environment and women’s empowerment, for the rule of law and the right to a say in one’s own future.”

[Speaking](#) at UN Headquarters, Mr. Ban said it has been a remarkable year for people seeking a say in shaping their societies and futures. “Men and women across the Middle East, North Africa and elsewhere have sought their democratic rights with remarkable fervour and creativity – and with remarkable success,” he stated before ringing the Peace Bell.

“Democracy is among the foundations of peace,” he added. “When people take part in the democratic process, when they become engaged, they build peace, day by day, year by year... On this day, I urge all champions of democracy and peace throughout the world to make your voices heard. The United Nations stands with you.”

The President of the 66th session of the General Assembly, Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, told the gathering that this year the International Day felt particularly significant.

“People around the globe, including our youth, are joining together and calling for peace and justice,” he said. “Historic shifts are taking place across the Arab world in the name of peace, democracy and human rights. These shifts remind us of the pressing need to seek peace peacefully and to use mediation and other tools to broker legitimate, lasting peace.

“We are also reminded that peace is not just the absence of war,” Mr. Al-Nasser added, noting that living peacefully means having food and shelter, health care and education, freedom and dignity. “To help ensure and promote sustainable peace, we must continue to focus on development, improving living standards and protecting human rights.”

The power of young people in shaping their societies was highlighted at a student observance of the International Day, featuring the participation of UN Messengers of Peace and Goodwill Ambassadors Michael Douglas, Jane Goodall, Stevie Wonder, Ishmael Beah, Yuna Kim and Monique Coleman, all of whom were also present at the peace bell ceremony.

Welcoming the participants, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information Kiyo Akasaka emphasized that young people are the future and have an important role to play in making peace a reality.

“Together, you represent history’s largest and most interconnected population of young people ever. Together, you have an opportunity to transform politics, economics, science, technology, and the world. You have enormous power,” he stated.

Ms. Coleman, the actress and musician who was appointed the first ever UN Youth Champion, says the main thing young people can do to advance peace and democracy in their societies is to “be peaceful” themselves.

“I think it’s incredible when young people stand up and speak out for what they believe in and fight for what’s right,” she said in an interview with the UN News Centre. “I think that we have to transition this fight from taking up arms to using our voices and equipping ourselves with being as knowledgeable and organized and intelligent as we possibly can but also peaceful.”

Speaking last night at an event organized by the UN Academic Impact (UNAI) programme to mark the Day, Mr. Ban noted that students were often on the frontlines of the recent struggles in North Africa and the Middle East, “inspiring the world with their commitment to peaceful protests and solidarity.”

The International Day of Peace was first established by the General Assembly in 1981 as an opportunity for people around the world to promote the resolution of conflict and to observe a cessation of hostilities.

Academy Award-winning actor Michael Douglas, the UN’s longest-serving Messenger of Peace, said he believes that the International Day of Peace is “more relevant than ever,” and that one only has to look at the amount of conflict that is going on around the world to realize that.

“I think more people are aware of it... of Peace Day and, hopefully, more aware of what the United Nations is doing,” he told the News Centre. “It’s a large Organization, sometimes unwieldy, but I’m personally strongly, strongly behind it because there is no organization that comes close to it worldwide.”

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