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Wave of change in Middle East shows ‘immense power’ of non-violence – Ban



“Non-Violence,” a sculpture by Karl Fredrik Reuterswärd, sits permanently outside UN Headquarters in New York

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The political transitions over the past year in various Middle Eastern and North African countries are examples of the power of non-violent methods to achieve peaceful change, [Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) said today as the United Nations marked the [International Day of Non-Violence](#).

“The dramatic events of the past year showed the immense power of non-violence,” he [said](#) at a special event at UN Headquarters to mark the Day, observed annually on 2 October.

“People in Tunisia, Egypt and beyond proved that it is more effective to fire off a tweet than to fire a gun. They did more than topple long-entrenched governments; they emboldened other oppressed peoples to think that the path of non-violence might work for them.

“This is not an easy path. There is a heavy risk for those who stare down the barrel of a gun armed only with the knowledge that they have right on their side,” noted Mr. Ban.

“But courageous individuals who embrace non-violence effectively corner their oppressors. Those oppressors will not like their choices. They can crack down harder – but that would reveal their moral bankruptcy. Or they can negotiate and trigger a process of change.

“Non-violence confounds those who face it – and that is why it works,” he stated.

In a separate [message](#) for the Day, Mr. Ban stressed the UN’s commitment to non-violent means, and said that the use of coercive measures should only be used as a last resort.

“The United Nations Charter clearly champions a peaceful, non-violent approach as the first recourse – utilizing means such as negotiation, mediation, arbitration and judicial settlement.

“When the Security Council has sanctioned the use of coercive measures, as was done earlier this year in Libya and Côte d’Ivoire, it was to protect civilians – and then only as a last resort, in the face of violence,” he said.

The Secretary-General called on Member States to re-commit to non-violent approaches as they play a vital role in all countries, including established democracies.

“Non-violence is not only an effective tactic; it is a strategy and the ultimate vision. Durable ends such as peace can only come through durable means – non-violence,” he said.

The observance of the Day also marks the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi, leader of India’s independence movement, whose non-violence philosophy and tactics have been adopted by leaders around the world.

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[Culture of non-violence starts with communities and individuals, Ban says](#)