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## **Ban urges young people to use their voices to build tolerance, understanding**



14 August 2010 – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today urged participants at a United Nations student forum to use their voices for the common good, and to build a culture of tolerance and understanding in a world that is more connected than ever before.

“It is often said that young people are the leaders of tomorrow. But you are already leaders. Your ideas, your actions, your decisions make a difference,” Mr. Ban said in a video message to the Second Annual Global Model UN Conference, which began today in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Over the course of five days, students from every region of the world will role play as foreign diplomats and participate in simulated sessions of the General Assembly and other multilateral bodies in the UN system.

More than 1,000 university-level students, ages 18 to 24, are taking part in the conference, which this year simulates a General Assembly summit on intercultural dialogue under the theme “Towards an Alliance of Civilizations: Bridging Cultures to achieve Peace and Development.”

Mr. Ban noted that recent global crises show the wisdom of this year's theme. “People around the world are connected as never before. In the face of pandemics, economic turmoil or climate change, it is plain that we sink or swim together.”

Yet, he added, too often people respond with fear, suspicion or even hatred.

"We must break these ancient habits. We need to forge a new way of relating to each other – as individuals, countries and societies. This is not a feel-good exercise. When we build a culture of tolerance and understanding, we build a better world?"

"More than any other generation before – you have a voice. I urge you to use your voices for the common good – for a true alliance of civilizations," he told the young people.

Earlier this week, the UN launched the International Year of Youth, stressing the need to harness the talents and energy of the world's young people to promote better understanding and dialogue between different generations, cultures and religions.

Dialogue and mutual understanding is the theme of the Year, which kicked off on 12 August, observed annually as International Youth Day.

Several hundred Model UN conferences are organized each year at all educational levels from primary school to university in many different configurations. While preparing for the conference, students develop leadership skills and research, writing, public speaking and problem solving skills that they will use throughout their lives.

In addition, participation also encourages consensus building, conflict resolution and cooperation and the enhancement of leadership skills.

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