

From New York to world's conflict zones, UN marks International Day of Peace



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon rings the Peace Bell at the annual ceremony marking the International Day of Peace. UN Photo/Paulo Filgueiras

21 September 2012 – From the traditional ringing of the Peace Bell at its Headquarters in New York to the front lines of the world's flashpoints where its peacekeepers are contributing to efforts to resolve conflicts, the United Nations today marked the [International Day of Peace](#) with a call for a total cessation of hostilities around the globe.

“In this tense global climate, we need a message of tolerance, dialogue, cooperation and harmony to resonate across the world,” [Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon](#) [said](#) as he rang the Peace Bell cast from pennies donated by children from 60 nations.

A gift from Japan that hangs from a wooden beam in a garden in front of UN Headquarters, the Peace Bell has tolled every year in a solemn call for peace since 1981, when the General Assembly established the Day to coincide with its opening session every September. The theme of this year’s observance is: Sustainable Peace for a Sustainable Future.

“The United Nations works for sustainable peace across the world,” Mr. Ban said. “We strive to prevent conflicts before they erupt – to resolve disputes through peaceful means – and to help people build the foundations of lasting peace.”

“Today we must ring the peace bell with extra force and conviction. We need its beautiful sound to be heard above the voices of discord and extremism that have sparked violence in recent days,” he added, flanked by UN Messengers of Peace and Goodwill Ambassadors, such as US actors Michael Douglas and Forest Whitaker, Holocaust survivor and human rights activist Elie Wiesel and conservationist Jane Goodall.

In his remarks, the UN chief highlighted two of the most concerning aspects of recent conflicts, the use of child soldiers to fight them and the unlawful mining of so-called blood diamonds and other natural resources to finance them.

“Natural resources should be used for the benefit of society, not to finance wars,” he stated. “Children should be in school, not recruited as soldiers. National budgets should focus on people’s needs, not deadly weapons.”

As at UN Headquarters, the International Day of Peace was marked at the world body’s various peacekeeping missions across the globe, with a minute of silence to honour the victims of conflict and other special events.

The UN currently deploys close to 120,000 peacekeepers – in military, police and civilian capacities – in 16 peace operations around the world, from Haiti in the Western Hemisphere to Timor-Leste in Asia, and various parts of Africa, including countries which have experienced renewed bouts of conflict lately, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

As part of the observance in New York, a student video-conference took place in coordination with a group of non-governmental organizations. Some 500 high school and college students attending in person were joined by youth from Liberia and South Sudan, two countries which currently host UN peacekeeping missions.

A main topic was the work of peacekeeping missions around the world to address natural resources as a part of efforts to maintain and build peace.

In Geneva, the UN Independent Expert on the promotion of a democratic and equitable international order, Alfred de Zayas, issued an appeal for a maximum worldwide effort to work for the peaceful settlement of all disputes.

“When negotiations are at an impasse, when States dig their heels in, it is time to ‘undig’ them in a spirit of compromise. We all need to unlearn the predator in us, unlearn discrimination, unlearn privilege,” he said in a [statement](#).

“Today, I call on States and civil society to keep faith with the United Nations Charter, refrain from the threat or the use of force, and to stop on-going propaganda for war, fear-mongering and sabre-rattling, which all are incompatible with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.”

News Tracker: past stories on this issue

[UN marks International Day of Peace with call to ‘make your voice heard’](#)