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## 'Active' tolerance vital during times of extraordinary change, UN officials say



Children from Cape Town, South Africa in the 1980s, when inter-racial marriage was illegal in the country

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Top United Nations officials stressed today the importance of practising active tolerance at a time when the world is undergoing unprecedented economic and political changes, and called for countries to embrace diversity, combat discrimination and increase education efforts about human rights.

“Our practice of tolerance must mean more than peaceful coexistence, crucial as that is. It must be an active understanding fostered through dialogue and positive engagement with others,” said [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon in his [message](#) to mark the International Day of Tolerance.

“Practising tolerance can serve as the antidote to prejudice and hatred,” he said, emphasizing that engaging with others is crucial to combat discrimination. “We all have a responsibility to protect those vulnerable to discrimination, whether based on race, religion, nationality, language, gender, sexual orientation or other factors.”

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Director-General of UN Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)) Irina Bokova echoed Mr. Ban's remarks, underscoring active tolerance as a way to make the most of human diversity as a source of vitality, creation and social cohesion.

“In a world that is more connected than ever, intolerance is not an option, and 'passive tolerance' or mere peaceful coexistence is not enough,” she said.

Ms. Bokova [stressed](#) that the key to active tolerance is quality education that enables individuals to take part in informed debates, listening and integrating different points of view.

“The building of an ethic of real tolerance today calls for each of us to improve our skills and our ability to embrace global diversity, by sharing knowledge, mastering languages, discovering cultures and learning the lessons of history,” she said.

President of the General Assembly Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser also emphasized the importance of education to promote tolerance and understanding, and urged countries to step up their efforts “to teach children about tolerance and human rights, about diversity and other cultures, and about other ways of life. Peace education needs to be a part of the teaching in all educational institutions.”

Mr. Al-Nasser added that even though there is a growing acknowledgement of the need for tolerance and dialogue, the world is still witnessing discrimination, extremism and radicalism every day.

Mr. Al-Nasser underlined the importance of mutual listening and solidarity to sustain peace, saying that given the current complexities and challenges, the world needs “enhanced respect, understanding and appreciation between individuals, families and communities.”

“I encourage Member States to reaffirm their commitment to promoting the universal human rights and fundamental freedoms of their peoples by supporting activities that build tolerance,” he said. “In doing so, we will enrich our oneness and our diversity, and thereby help to build a peaceful world for all.

To mark the day, UNESCO also [announced](#) the winners of its Madanjeet Singh Prize for the Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Violence, who will be honoured during a special ceremony on 9 December in Paris.

Afghan women's rights campaigner Anarkali Honaryar and Palestinian peace activist Khaled Abu Awwad will be recognized for their contributions.

Ms. Honaryar has helped women who suffer from domestic violence and abuse in her country, and last year became the first non-Muslim woman to become a member of the lower house of the Afghan Parliament, while Mr. Awwad is one of the main leaders in the reconciliation process between Palestinians and Israelis, working for development and democracy in the region.

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