



## **Welcome Speech**

**by**

**Mr. Anwarul K. Chowdhury**

**Under Secretary-General  
and**

**High Representative for the Least Developed Countries,  
Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island  
Developing States**

**at the conference hosted by**

**The Hague Appeal for Peace  
on**

**“Developing Democracy through Peace  
Education: Educating Toward a World without  
Violence”**

**Linza, Albania  
20 October 2004**

Dear friends,

[Makes references to Alfred Nobel's birth anniversary next day and Nobel Peace Prize for Wangari Maathai]

Let me begin by saying how happy and honoured I am to join you at Linza for this amazing gathering of dedicated people determined to strive for the cause of peace and democracy. I pay a special tribute to Cora Weiss, a vanguard of global movement for peace, and for her wonderful work in promoting peace education around the world. I thank you, Cora and your hard-working team for having so ably organized this four-day meeting. We have in front of us a very rich programme of work that will require all of our most pro-active participation and continuing involvement.

My heartfelt thanks go to the people and government of Albania for their cordial welcome and hospitality accorded to all of us. We are very happy to be in your beautiful country.

At the outset, allow me to convey my deepest appreciation for the relentless efforts made by all of you, all over the world, to implement the fifty points of the 1999 Agenda of the Hague Appeal for Peace. I look forward to sharing our experiences from our different backgrounds, building partnerships, strengthening our networks, our strategies and focussing our visions of a better future through the promotion of a culture of peace at all levels.

In our everyday life, we find tremendous inspiration in the Hague Agenda, in the Global Campaign for Peace Education, in the wealth of concrete initiatives that are mushrooming around our battered planet – initiatives of the young people being presented are commendable - in the variety of programmes, tools and resources, such as the immensely valuable resource packet of the Campaign, on "Learning to Abolish War: Teaching Toward a Culture of Peace", that show us that a true culture of peace can be achieved.

As we commence our journey in the twenty-first century, we cannot but consider the paradox existing in the level of development reached by the modern world. On one hand, through globalization, an irreversible trend toward a global village has been established, while on the other, divisions have increased. Progress in the fields of science and technology, trade and communications, has boosted global wealth to levels that seemed unreachable few decades ago. We can now see immense possibilities. We have the power to change the world for the better. However, great differences still exist between regions -- disparities and inequalities have over the years only augmented causing the world to enter into a new era of insecurity.

We are living in years when people fear deadly attacks by terrorists, suffer from genocide or massive violations of human rights carried out by, on most occasions, their own governments. Despite the great advances in science and medicine, millions are dying from HIV/AIDS. Despite all the efforts, too many people live in extreme poverty, hunger, disease, or do not have access to clean water, or to basic education and health. Worst victims everywhere are the women and children.

Poverty and lack of opportunities deprive people of their dignity as human beings, leaving them hopeless and incapable of pursuing the kind of life they may desire. Marginalization and abuse because of ethnicity, gender or religion, social turbulence, repression, violence and terror are all closely linked to poverty and the concurrent lack of basic human rights.

These are huge, persistent problems, which call, as never before, for unity within the international community, for unity across borders and religions, and for an integrated approach to solving them that is based on **education for peace, human rights and democracy**.

Although I am sure that all of you have heard it many times, allow me to quote from the UNESCO Constitution because of its relevance and value: *"Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed"*.

The flourishing of culture of peace will generate the mindset that is a prerequisite for the transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace. Culture of peace will then provide the bedrock to support a stable, progressing and prospering world - a world that is finally at peace with itself.

The need for a culture of peace is evident as we reflect on how our civilization has succumbed, from time to time, and still again very recently, to the human frailties of greed, ambition, xenophobic myopia, and selfishness. We have seen that heinous acts are often committed under the veil of public mandates when in fact they are the wishes of the few in power, be they economic, political, military, or even religious.

Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach that is built on trust, dialogue and collaboration. For that, we have to build **a grand alliance amongst all**, particularly with the proactive involvement and participation of civil society and practitioners of peace like you.

No social responsibility is greater nor task heavier than that of securing peace on our planet. As Mahatma Gandhi has said: *"Non-violence is not a garment to be put on and off at will. Its seat is in the heart, and it must be an inseparable part of our very being"*.

Non-violence can truly flourish when the world is free of poverty, hunger, discrimination, exclusion, intolerance and hatred - when women and men can realize their highest potential and live a secure and fulfilling life. Until then, each and every one of us would have to contribute - collectively and individually - to build peace through non-violence.

The most significant way of promoting a culture of peace is through peace education. This is what we are here for. Peace education needs to be accepted in all parts of the world, in all societies and countries as an essential element in building a culture of peace. Peace studies in all educational institutions must be incorporated as part of their curricula. Peace studies must be an essential part of our educational process as reading and writing.

The international network supporting the goals of the Global Campaign for Peace Education must receive our continuous support. Educators in schools and communities look to us for help in addressing complex issues such as teaching the skills of reconciliation, understanding diverse cultures, accepting differences. Never has it been more important for the next generation to learn about the world and understand its diversity. The task of educating children to find non-aggressive means to relate with one another is of primary importance. At higher levels, curricula must include human rights, the rules governing international law, the United Nations Charter, the goals of our global organization, peace, disarmament, sustainable development. The participation of young people in this process is very essential. Their inputs in terms of their own ideas on how to cooperate with each other in order to eliminate violence in our societies must be fully taken into account.

The worldwide efforts for spreading peace education that are represented here tonight constitute the international community's contribution to the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010), declared by the United Nations and drawing on the 1999 United Nations Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace. It was indeed an honour for me to chair the nine-month long negotiations that led to the adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action. I would always treasure and cherish the opportunity that for me was a realization of my personal commitment to peace and to a better world for the future generations.

The work for peace is a continuous process and I am convinced that culture of peace is absolutely the most essential vehicle for realizing the goals and objectives of the United Nations in the twenty-first century.

It is heartening to see all the progress that has been made on peace education but there is still a long way to go and your passionate work during the next three days will give a great impetus to the Hague Agenda and the Global Campaign.

Let's pursue our goal of a world without violence with even greater commitment, dedication and, above all, unending enthusiasm. Your work will empower the people of the world to secure for all of us the inherent right to peace and non-violence.

\*\*\*\*\*