UN Statement on the International Day of Peace

Every year on the International Day of Peace, people around the world commit to non-violence and to harmony among all peoples and nations. Peace is our mission; our day-to-day quest.

This year’s theme focuses on the timely issue of peace and democracy. Democracy is a core value of the United Nations. It is crucial for human rights. It provides channels for resolving differences. It gives hope to the marginalized and power to the people. But democracy does not just happen; it has to be nurtured and defended.

The world needs you to speak out: for social justice and freedom of the press; for a clean environment and women’s empowerment; for the rule of law and the right to a say in one’s own future.

This year, young people have been on the frontlines for freedom. I salute the activists and ordinary people for their courage and determination to build a better future. We at the United Nations will work in common cause to realize our shared aspirations for dignity, security and opportunity for all.

To all those seeking peace, this is your day, and we are with you.
In the midst of confusion and violence, many have fallen prey to the evil wishes of the perpetrators and entrepreneurs of war and feel violent and confused, many times resorting to retaliation and counter violence.

This was the situation in Kabul on September 21 this year — on the Day of Peace itself — with the tragic killing of the head of the High Peace Council of Afghanistan in his house in Kabul.

It is difficult to fix things when such harm is done, and a comprehensive peace vision is needed to intervene and change the confusing atmosphere. Nevertheless, UPF members went ahead with programs to observe the International Day of Peace in Kabul on September 22, the very next day. Around 100 people participated, including volunteers for peace, teachers, and members of civil society.

The program commenced with a recitation from the holy Qur'an, followed by a reading of the messages of UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and President Hamid Karzai on the International Day of Peace. These were followed by speeches, poems, personal stories, and music on themes of peace, unity, and brotherhood.

Mr. Rahman Ali Jawed, an Ambassador for Peace, expressed his delight that people had come together to respect and honor one another, recalling their faith in the recognition of human dignity and rights. He thanked God for giving humanity the capacity to think, will, and differentiate good from evil, light from darkness, peace from war and violence, beauty from ugliness, and to act upon their innate nature which is inherited from the nature of God.

“Let’s use the opportunity to shake hands with each other within this country and with people throughout the world,” he said, expressing the longing of the Afghan people to live in peace.

Mr. Waleyullah Rahmani, head of the Kabul Center for Strategic Studies, gave examples of other people who achieved peace after long struggles and concluded, “We can also attain peace if we work hard on the various levels of society.”

Mr. Aara, the Chair of the Kabul Private Schools Union and Collaborators of Education, added, “If we can’t bring peace on the political level, we can at least make peace at home and in our schools.”

Then people were invited to stand and share their own stories related to peace. One of the volunteer speakers, Mrs. Hamida, came to the stage and said: “Peace for me means giving us the chance to express our opinions, and today UPF helped me to practice it.”

A music band sang many songs of peace and patriotism, unity, harmony, and brotherhood. Among them was a well-known song of unity: “If we are from Kandahar or Bamyan, we are brothers.”
ARGENTINA — 173 poetry submissions were made for the International Day of Peace Poetry contest. The winning poem was “Utopia” by Teresa Gatti from Villa Angela.

BARBADOS — A series of educational and spiritual seminars, tree planting at the A. Da Costa Edwards Primary School, and a discussion on domestic violence at the Ministry of Education.

BRAZIL — UPF joined the Commercial Association of Sao Paulo and others for the Commemoration of a Peace Monument dedicated to children. The founder of the project, Luigi Brancati who had lived through World War II as a child, wished the monument to be a reminder for us to promote peace.

COLOMBIA — Three programs in Bogota organized by Muslim, Jewish and Christian leaders calling for interreligious cooperation in order to solve problems in society, with a joint declaration for Rosh Hashanah 5772.

DOMINICAN REPUBLIC — A commemoration of the International Day of Peace on September 21 in Barahona.

ECUADOR — A minute of silence was observed at the Hall of the National Union of Journalists followed by a reading of the message of Lucia Satamea-Palacios, director of UN Women in Colombia and Ecuador and greetings from several congressmen and international diplomats.

GUYANA — Prime Minister Samuel Hinds spoke on the UN’s theme for this year, “Make Your Voice Heard: Peace and Democracy,” with interfaith prayers and children’s dances.

HONDURAS — A meeting in Tegucigalpa.

MEXICO — Hundreds of schoolchildren and university students joined an exuberant program at the Universidad Panamericana in partnership with the NGO Vivir en Paz.

NICARAGUA — A program at the Martin Luther King Evangelical Nicaraguan University with addresses from Dr. Ramiro Cortez, Rector, and former Minister of the Family Lic. Ivania Toruno.

PARAGUAY — Dr. Felipe Samaniego (Member of the Senate) and Maria Gonzalez Baez (Secretary of Women, Presidency of the Republic) academics, lawyers, and directors of colleges were among the guests at a seminar on the Principles of Democracy for Peace and Good Governance.

PERU — A meeting in the Peruvian Congress organized by Pastor Dr. Orestes Sanchez, UPF Co-chair, was opened by Dr. Daniel Abugattas Majluf, President of the Congress, with other congressmen from all parties attending. Representatives of the major religions offered prayers and lit candles for peace. Mrs. Rebeca Arias, UN Resident Coordinator and the Resident Representative of the UN Development Programme, was a keynote speaker. University students and high school students were among the guests.

URUGUAY — An interreligious peace summit featured Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and other faith leaders in a program addressed by the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Uruguayan Board for Interreligious Dialogue.

VENEZUELA — Hundreds of youth and their families from a wide array of partner organizations joined a peace walk.
UPF NORTH AMERICA

LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS — Ambassadors for Peace held an interfaith prayer vigil on the steps of the Arkansas State Capitol. Todd Montgomery of Heifer International, described how the organization has saved hundreds of thousands of people from poverty and hunger through donating animals. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon’s message was read by UPF State Coordinator Bruce Biggin, and leaders of five faiths offered prayers.

TAMPA, FLORIDA — The Tampa chapter of UPF organized a “Family Day of Peace” at the University of South Florida. Sixty people participated, led by seven Ambassadors for Peace, and 13 non-profits displayed information tables. The keynote speaker was Hillsborough County Commissioner Ken Hagan, joined by Dustin McGahee, President of Youth for Human Rights, Florida; Michelle Walker, Founder and President of Miracles Outreach (helping at risk teenagers); Cathy Smith, Hillsborough County Department of Juvenile Justice; and Cynthia Keeton, Hillsborough County Department of Health.

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA — A charity fundraiser, “Peace Expressed through Music” celebrated the International Day of Peace in a program co-sponsored with Lovin’ Life Ministries. It was an evening of music, songs, poems, and inspirational readings. Individuals sang and read peace messages from Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa, Father Sun Myung Moon and many others important figures. Proceeds from the evening went to the local Liberia Crisis Center, which offers services to the many Liberian refugees who have made North Carolina their new home.

RICHMOND, VIRGINIA — The 30th UN International Day of Peace was celebrated with a “Family Peace Festival.” More than 60 sponsors, vendors, and non-profit exhibitors participated, and about 1,200 people visited the event. Prominent among the many organizations present were the Interfaith Council of Greater Richmond, Amnesty International, Commonwealth Catholic Charities, the City of Richmond (several departments), League of Women Voters, Falun Gong, VA Interfaith Center on Public Policy, and the Universal Peace Federation.

WASHINGTON, WASHINGTON — An interfaith water of peace ceremony featured Mr. Sluggo Rigor, a Catholic; Mrs. Cindy Etter, a Baha’i; Mr. Rizwan Samad, a Muslim; Mrs. Alicia Haq, a Buddhist; Mrs. Lavanya Reddy, a Hindu; Pastor Richard Rivers, a Christian; and Rev. Larry Krishneek and Mrs. Noriko Fisher, Unificationists. Following this, Mrs. Cindy Etter gave a talk about the history of the Baha’i Faith and their work for interfaith harmony and peace.

WASHINGTON DC — Over 80 guests, including four Ambassadors and representatives from 13 embassies, attended the program at The Washington Times building. Among them were nine guests from the Republic of Congo Brazzaville and graduate students from George Washington University in DC. Speakers included Farah Al Atassi, Founder and President of the Arab Information & Resource Center in Georgetown; H.E. Srdjan Darmanovic, Ambassador of Montenegro to the United States; and Amelda Beluli, Program Manager at the National Albanian American Council.

MONTREAL, CANADA — Shaheen Ashraf, a member of the National Board of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, shared her thoughts as a Muslim living in Canada for 35 years. Rev. Bruce Gourlay, a Presbyterian minister originally from the United States, shared how immigration has changed his congregation in Montreal, now composed mostly of Africans from English-speaking West Africa.
Interfaith cooperation for peace was a common theme in many International Day of Peace events in Asia as speakers called for a moral and spiritual awakening to accompany the welcome rise of democratic processes throughout the world.

In Nepal, Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, and Christian leaders joined in prayers for peace at an event attended by leaders of the country’s diverse political factions.

In Indonesia, a conference at a university emphasized the multi-ethnic character of the nation. “Diversity does not always mean disengagement and disharmony, but it induces a more colorful and dynamic picture of reality,” one speaker stated; in addition to Muslim speakers, panelists included Hindu, Buddhist, and Christian representatives. Speakers at a Taiwan symposium examined UPF’s proposal for an interreligious council at the United Nations.

On the International Day of Peace in Bangkok, Thailand, the national Interreligious Peace Council was inaugurated, based on the foundation of many months of consultation with religious officials and government ministries. Representatives of several religions poured water into a common bowl, representing their common commitment to promote mutual understanding, respect, and cooperation.

Students in New Delhi, India, competed in an inter-collegiate “Play Football Make Peace” tournament and debated the relevance of non-violence as a strategy for promoting lasting peace.

Cambodian youth listened to a presentation on the principles of conflict resolution and then visited the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, where they viewed displays and offered prayers for those who lost their lives. Thai youth created video clips on the theme of peace and submitted them to a national contest; prizes were awarded on the National Day of Peace. UPF-Sri Lanka organized a character education conference at a university. Traditional music and poetry about peace comforted the hearts of young and old as they gathered to express their longing for a lasting peace in Afghanistan.

International Day of Peace celebrations offered opportunities to connect with diplomats. The conference at the Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic State University in Jakarta, Indonesia, was attended by representatives of seven embassies. The Ambassador of Afghanistan to Japan described his country’s hopes for peace at a seminar in Tokyo, Japan.
UPF Eurasia

Since peace education is a key element of UPF’s work in Eurasia, many International Day of Peace programs took place in schools and universities. In Russia, young UPF volunteers taught classes about conflict resolution and peacemaking in schools. Art, music, poetry, and crafts helped bring to life the UN’s message for the International Day of Peace, and innovative activities included students in Sverdlovsk building a “wall of peace” and students in Volgograd creating multimedia presentations in English and French and lining a boulevard with drawings of peace. High school students in Estonia were encouraged to think of themselves as peacemakers, and programs at universities in Moldova encouraged students to volunteer to help make their communities more peaceful and harmonious.

Other Day of Peace activities addressed the legacies of conflict. In Belarus, conference speakers examined the history of destroyed villages, and a ceremony at the Memorial to the Anti-Fascist Coalition in Moscow included speeches and laying wreaths in memory of the honored dead. Activities in Georgia assisted the children of internally displaced families. The Peace Embassy in Latvia hosted an informal gathering of families.

Forums in Moscow, Nizhny Novgorod, and Novosibirsk, Russia brought together academics, NGO representatives, and religious leaders to promote cooperation and coordination of efforts of different organizations in creating a culture of peace; in Chelyabinsk, participants addressed strategies for reducing litter and alcohol abuse. Women’s groups in Moscow, Perm, and Yekaterinburg visited orphanages, rehabilitation centers, and programs for immigrant children, bring gifts and activities to uplift their spirits.

The “Hour of Running” programs raised public awareness of the International Day of Peace as youth and families distributed fliers to people in the parks and boulevards of Moscow, Nizhnevartovsk, Nizhny Novgorod, Novosibirsk, Rostov on the Don River, Vladivostok, and Yekaterinburg. In addition to spreading the ideals of peace, these activities promote a healthy and moral lifestyle, family values, and cooperation.
IRELAND — People from many different religions and nationalities assembled at the Lantern Interfaith Center. The talk of the evening “From a culture of conflict to a culture of peace” was given by Mr. Alan McCann. Groups discussed the question: “What we teach our children to make them people of peace?” Participants sang verses from “This Is My Song,” and people from different backgrounds lit the peace candles.

SPAIN — Fauzi Fates, a phylologist at the University of Tripoli, and a representative of The House of Libya in Catalunya, Spain, spoke on the topic “Libya: Present and Future” at the program in Barcelona. “Libya is being reborn,” he said. “Although there is much work ahead, we have confidence we can build a nation that follows the path of peace.”

NORWAY — On this UN International Day of Peace, we focused on how we could strengthen and develop peace and democracy, both in Norway and globally. Around 70 people from various sectors and backgrounds gathered for the program.

UPF-Norway Secretary General Steinar Murud spoke on the theme: “Focus on similarities rather than differences!” “We do not want cultures in a society to develop into ghettos,” he said. “But we want the different cultures to find their similarities and work together in building the common society they are all part of.” Representatives from Sikh, Baha’i, Muslim, Christian, and Buddhist backgrounds also spoke at the Oslo Central Mosque.

GERMANY — Bonn - A colorful group of people from Asia and Africa heard presentations on Jeremy Gilley’s “Peace One Day” and the worldwide activities of UPF.

Dusseldorf — An interreligious gathering included a Hindu meditation and peace prayer and an explanation of the importance of the Day of Peace by Anja Brina.

Munich - UPF-Munich and the Association of Islamic Cultural Centers organized a peace prayer at the Fatih Mosque.

Stuttgart — A “House of Religions” event featured Ban Ki-moon’s message and a talk by Karl-Christian Hausmann, Secretary General, UPF-Germany.
SLOVAKIA — Volunteers bought creative material and encouraged students in two primary schools in Nitra, the Prince Pribina Primary School and the Beethoven Primary School, to commemorate the International Day of Peace by creating postcards on the theme of peace.

ITALY — UPF organized programs in Bergamo, Milano, Monza and Torino. UPF Italy also participated in the annual Assisi congress for peace.

FRANCE — France has made the headlines recently with news of resistance towards its increasingly secular response toward religious and cultural expressions of faith in one of Europe’s most diverse societies. The Women’s Federation for World Peace and UPF-France organized a Day of Peace forum on the topic “Does Multiculturalism Still Contribute to Peace?”

ALBANIA — UPF-Albania and the Family Federation for World Peace commemorated the International Day of Peace by distributing school supplies to Roma orphans in Tirana on September 27 and again in Shkodra on September 28. Volunteers spent a month raising the funds to purchase the supplies.

NETHERLANDS — Programs took place at the Dialogue Center in Amsterdam and at Cristus Triumfator Church in the Hague.

UNITED KINGDOM — Peace activists from various parts of the world talked about their work during forums at UPF’s Lancaster Gate offices, and in the South London borough of Bromley.

ITALY — UPF organized programs in Bergamo, Milano, Monza and Torino. UPF Italy also participated in the annual Assisi congress for peace.
MELBOURNE, AUSTRALIA — The UPF celebration began with a traditional aboriginal welcome, followed by a discussion of the historical decision of the UN General Assembly to establish the Day of Peace 30 years ago. Marisa Vedar, director of Gawad Kalinga (GK), the Filipino service and community-building organization spoke about the organization’s work in Australia and with the international Filipino community.

MAJURO, MARSHALL ISLANDS — A program sponsored with the College of the Marshall Islands and the UPF Peace Embassy on the topic Democracy and Peace. Hon. Eldon Note, an Ambassador for Peace, lawyer, and former mayor of the Bikini atoll, read the UN statement on “Peace and Democracy: Make Your Voice Heard.” The keynote speaker was the Hon Kessai Note, former President of the Marshall Islands and member of the UPF presiding council.

One interesting note: some students asked why the Marshall Islands, which have not experienced conflict or bloodshed in recent times, even need a peace initiative – a happy challenge for UPF Director Kenichi Ito, who spoke about inner peace and peace in the family as the foundation for all peace.

AUCKLAND, NEW ZEALAND — A diverse audience gathered at the Maori Anglican Church to mark this important UN day. Cannon Lloyd Popata opened with prayer, and Paula Jakeman, a Maori church elder, offered welcoming remarks. MC Geoffrey Fyers, UPF, introduced the event and spoke about the meaning of the day.

Speakers included Member of Parliament Su’a William Sio; Gary Russell, co-president of the UN association of New Zealand; Ngatamariki Lulia of the Women’s Federation, and Rangi Mclean, a Maori leader from South Auckland, who spoke about his initiative to open up his Maori marae (a community meeting place) to the wider community so it can become a place where all people could gather.

HONIARA, SOLOMON ISLANDS — A school assembly for 300 students at the Vura Community High School included an explanation of the International Day of Peace, the message of Ban Ki-moon, One Minute of Silence, a peace quiz and a song. A second event was held at New Hope Academy on September 24 with Alice Hou as MC. Pastor George Tafoa offered the opening prayer, followed by remarks by UPF director Chihiro Midorikawa and interfaith prayers. Both events were covered by the Solomon Star newspaper.
UPF Africa

UPF Chapters in 15 African nations conducted Day of Peace programs in 2011, the highest tally to date. Some of the highlights of several days of conferences, service programs, festivals, and seminars—

COTONOU, BENIN — A week of conferences and discussions on the theme “Peace and Democracy: Let Your Voice be Heard,” culminating in an interfaith choir performance and awards ceremony.

NANGREONGO, BURKINA FASO — The Minister of Environment and Sustainable Development, the Hon Jean Koulidiaty, served as patron for a large tree-planting festival attended by 1500 people.

BANGUI, BIMBO AND GABABAJA, CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC — A series of peace conferences for youth, university students and NGO leaders and the launch of a fish-farming project, coordinated by Ralph Oppenheimer.

BRAZZAVILLE, CONGO — Four hundred people attended a program at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; messages were read by UNAIDS representative Mr. Traore and UPF’s Zodji Augustin. Meanwhile, a delegation from UPF-Congo visited the UN and UPF headquarters during the opening of the 66th General Assembly.

ACCRA, GHANA — A two-day peace seminar led by UPF-Ghana’s Helen Osei included a visit to bring gifts of food, clothing, and toys to the Hope Children’s Orphanage in Gomoa Fetteh in Central Ghana.

NAIROBI, KENYA — Mohammed M. Mwinypembe, Secretary General of the Kenya National Commission for UNESCO, was the keynote speaker at a joint celebration of the International Day of Peace and the Muslim holiday Eid ul-Fitr. Dr. Markandey Rai, Chief of Global Parliamentarians, UN Habitat, read the 2011 message by Ban Ki-moon.

HARPER, LIBERIA — Gerald B. Coleman, UPF-Liberia and Dean of Engineering & Technology at Tubman University, led a tree-planting ceremony celebrating the nation’s return to peace after a decade of conflict. A few days later the country’s President, Ellen Sirleaf, was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

QUATRE-BORNES, MAURITIUS — Children’s dances, creole songs and Hindu lamp ceremonies brought a festive spirit to a program in partnership with Brahma Kumaris and the Women’s Federation for World Peace.

CASAMANCE, SENEGAL — A call for peace on the theme “Let’s unite in heart.”

VICTORIA, SEYCHELLES — A program at the National Theater on the theme of community building with speeches by the chair of the national NGO committee, a bishop, and the Seychelles’ founding president, Sir James Mancham.

Kigali, Rwanda — Planting of a “peace pole” and other ceremonies at the New Hope Technical Institute.

Freetown, Sierra Leone — UPF volunteers conducted a transformational cleanup at the Connaught Teaching Hospital, built in 1912. The project was featured on national TV, and hospital manager Mr. Foday Musa congratulated UPF on “a practical demonstration of interfaith in action.”

LOME AND KARA, TOGO — Over 500 Ambassadors for Peace attended two conferences on the theme “Leadership and good governance for peace and democracy.”
UPF acknowledges that peace must be founded on the basic, most intimate social unit of humankind — the Family!

Join our Marriage & Family Peace Initiatives taking place around the world. To learn more please visit: www.upf.org/family