



**“Message on World Peace and Tolerance”**

**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 inauguration of**

**The Human Forum  
Organized by the Alliance for the New Humanity**

**San Juan, Puerto Rico  
1 December 2004**

Dear friends,

Let me begin by saying how happy and honoured I am to join you here in Puerto Rico for the inauguration of the Human Forum. This wonderful gathering of dedicated people is something we've all looked forward to and I am confident it will give new boost to our efforts to strive for the cause of peace and tolerance.

I would also like to pay a special tribute to Roberto Savio, Chairman of the Board of the Alliance for the New Humanity. I profoundly appreciate his leadership that has guided us for decades, his open thinking and clear, relentless commitment for the good of humanity.

Peace and tolerance are themes on which the United Nations, as the only universal body, has been working on since its inception as basic foundations of its day-to-day activities.

Increasingly, peace and development have become inextricably linked and it is in this context that I carry out my duties as United Nations High Representative of the most vulnerable groups countries (the Least Developed, the Landlocked and the Small Island Developing States).

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 the creation of a truly 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 only few decades ago.

Thanks to human creativity and genius, 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.

Despite the great advances in science and medicine, millions are dying from HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and other curable diseases.

Despite all the efforts, too many people still live today 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.

In our age, people fear deadly attacks by terrorists and suffer from genocide or massive violations of human rights which, on most occasions, are carried out by their own governments.

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.

As recent events have painfully reminded us, the human mind is capable of breeding intolerance, harbouring hatred and inflicting pain on fellow human beings. It is indeed this side of the human mind that poses the gravest challenge for mankind. The challenge is to prevent the human mind from becoming consumed by ignorance, fear, violence, fratricide and intolerance.

We have seen war, intra-state conflicts, endemic violence and social strife. We have seen ignorance and fear erode our values. We have seen worst forms of intolerance in racism and xenophobia. We have seen widespread deprivation, conflict over scarce resources and suppression of human rights. We have seen a culture of war and violence spread its venomous tentacles threatening to destroy all that is good, moral and just and undermine the progress of mankind.

The magnitude of these problems requires, more than ever, all human beings to work together in finding new solutions. One lesson learned from the past is that to prevent history from repeating itself, the values of non-violence, tolerance and democracy will have to be inculcated in every woman and man – children and adults alike.

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 need for a **culture of peace** is evident as we reflect on how our civilization has succumbed, time and again, 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.

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.

**In 1999, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a landmark decision: the Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace.** The adoption of this document has been our most significant achievement at the United Nations in the promotion of culture of

peace. To me, culture of peace is a set a values, attitudes and ways of life base on principle of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, and respect for diversity, dialogue and understanding.

The Declaration highlights the ideals, norms and objectives of a global culture of peace. The Programme of Action accompanying the Declaration identifies major areas such as: education, sustainable development, human rights, equality between women and men, democratic participation, advancing understanding, tolerance and solidarity and international peace and security.

It was an honour for me to Chair the nine-month long negotiations that led to the adoption of the Declaration and Programme of Action. 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.

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 at all levels.

We need a movement that creates a culture of peace and non-violence in the world and promotes dialogue among civilizations. A movement that ensures that amity would replace atrocity, harmony would overcome hatred and stability would remove suspicion.

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 **Declaration and Programme of Action on Culture of Peace** provides all of us with a clear set of guidelines for action. It is a universal document in the real sense transcending borders, cultures, beliefs and societies. It identifies actors who have a role in advancing culture of peace. In addition to states and international organizations like the United Nations, it includes religious and community leaders, parents, family, teachers, artists, professors, journalists and student.

The United Nations – as the only universal body – needs the support of every country, every individual. It must take the lead in fulfilling its Charter obligation of maintaining international peace and security worldwide. In the

responsibility that the United Nations must shoulder, stronger focus on prevention and peace building is essential.

Dear friends,

The United Nations declared the first decade of the new Millennium as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010).

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.

With the goal of a world without violence in mind, I look forward to thought-provoking discussions in this Human Forum.

\*\*\*\*\*