

International Day of Peace Student Observance
19 September 2008

“Peace is the United Nations’ highest calling”

- **Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon**

Background information on the International Day of Peace

The International Day of Peace started 27 years ago. Its purpose, as stated in the original United Nations General Assembly resolution, is:

"[...T]o devote a specific time to concentrate the efforts of the United Nations and its Member States, as well as of the whole of mankind, to promoting the ideals of peace and to giving positive evidence of their commitment to peace in all viable ways... [The International Day of Peace] should be devoted to commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace both within and among all nations and peoples."

In 2001, the observance of the International Day of Peace was moved from the third Tuesday of September to 21 September to be observed each year as “a day of global ceasefire and non-violence, an invitation to all nations and people to honour a cessation of hostilities for the duration of the Day.”

Last year, warring factions in Afghanistan honoured the International Day of Peace by allowing immunization teams to vaccinate 1.3 million children against polio.

2008 Theme: Peace and Human Rights

To help you prepare your students for the International Day of Peace student observance at UN Headquarters on Friday, 19 September 2008, we have created some handouts for you and your students to use. **Student Handout 1** introduces students to the three pillars that the United Nations was founded on – Peace and Security, Human Rights, and Development to give them a broader context for the observance of this event.

In addition to discussing each pillar, it is important for students to understand how these three pillars are interconnected. Failure to achieve any one of them will threaten progress made on the other two. After students read **Student Handout 1**, use **Teacher Handout 1** to start a discussion on the three pillars and how they are connected.

The programme for the student observance on 19 September will include remarks from United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, the President of the United Nations General Assembly and an interactive session with a number of the United Nations Messengers of Peace during which students will have an opportunity to ask questions. In addition, students from peacekeeping missions in Liberia, Afghanistan and Sudan will also be participating via videoconference. Therefore, we are including links to web sites on each of the peacekeeping missions for you and your students to look at to become familiar with the what the UN is doing to promote peace and stability in these countries. Use **Teacher Handout 1** for ideas on how to start a discussion on these conflicts and what the United Nations is doing to promote peace in these three countries.

Finally, **Student Handout 2** contains a list of online resources for students to use to explore this year's theme and the conflicts that will be discussed. And **Teacher Handout 2** contains a list of online resources teachers can use to further explore these issues in the classroom.

Young people should be encouraged to go beyond the classroom and school into the community and beyond. An important part of your students' participation in the event on 19 September is to come up with ideas for projects they could work on that would help build a Culture of Peace in some way. Projects that other students have initiated or are involved in will be discussed at the event. You can begin to brainstorm with your

students about what they could do before the event and continue the discussion afterwards. Check the International Day of Peace website on the [UN Cyberschoolbus](#)

We hope this guide to this year's observance of the International Day of Peace will be a useful tool to prepare students in advance. The more your students are aware of what this International Day is about, the more meaningful it will be for them.

Launch of International Day of Peace text messaging campaign

To help raise awareness about the International Day of Peace, the United Nations Department of Public Information has launched a text messaging campaign called "TXT 4 PEACE." From now until 21 September, you can send a message of peace via your mobile phone that will be given to world leaders when they gather at the UN for the 63th session of the General Assembly on 23 September. If you don't have a mobile phone you will be able to send your message via the Internet. Visit www.peaceday2008.org for more information on how to participate in this campaign. Spread the word to your family and friends.

Student Handout 1

The United Nations was founded on three pillars:

- Peace and Security
- Human Rights
- Development

These pillars are intricately connected to each other. Success in one area will improve the chances of success in the other two. For example, if human rights are protected there is a greater likelihood that peace and security will be maintained. Similarly, failure in one area may destabilize the other two. This year's observance of the International Day of Peace will focus primarily on the connection between the first two pillars – Peace and Human Rights. Here is some general information about each pillar that you should be aware of.

Peace and Security

The United Nations was created **“to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind.”** Peace is a common desire of all peoples throughout the world. Keeping peace and developing friendly relations among nations are among the main objectives of the United Nations.

Since its founding in 1945, the UN has been both a witness and catalyst to an extraordinary transition in global relations. From the ruins of the Second World War and through the years clouded by nuclear threat during the Cold War and numerous regional conflicts, the United Nations has evolved into an organization in which the collective search for stability is an overriding concern. Today, peace and security are no longer viewed only in terms of the absence of military conflict. The common interests of all

people are also seen to be affected by poverty, hunger, environmental degradation, and human rights violations which are often at the heart of national and international tensions.

While more than one organ of the United Nations plays an important role in making recommendations and helping resolve armed conflicts, the Security Council is the main UN organ that's responsible for maintaining international peace and security.

Threats to peace and security occur when human rights are violated, when laws either don't exist or aren't enforced, and when there is widespread poverty.

Human Rights

The UN Charter begins by affirming “**faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small.**” This principle led to the adoption of the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR) by the General Assembly on December 10, 1948—60 years ago. It is the best-known and most-cited human rights document in the world! The connection between human rights and peace is acknowledged in the first sentence of the Preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

“...recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world.”

The Universal Declaration was a landmark achievement in world history. It marked the first:

- time that the rights and freedoms of individuals were set forth in such detail.

- international recognition that human rights and fundamental freedoms are applicable to every person, everywhere.

Today, the UDHR continues to affect people's lives. It serves as a model for numerous international treaties and declarations and has been incorporated in the constitutions and laws of many countries. The Declaration has inspired more than 60 international human rights instruments. Together, they constitute a comprehensive system of legally-binding treaties for the promotion and protection of human rights.

Due to the central importance of human rights in achieving the United Nations' mission, the [Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights \(OHCHR\)](#) has grown significantly over the past decade. In 1996 the OHCHR was in 14 countries; currently OHCHR-supported human rights personnel are deployed in over 40 countries to make sure that international human rights standards are properly implemented. These field offices play an important role in identifying and developing responses to human rights challenges. Among these responses are monitoring human rights violations and implementing projects to support legislative reform, ratification of human rights treaties, and human rights education.

Development

The United Nations also aims “...**to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.**” All development is ultimately about expanding human potential

and human freedoms. Stated another way, development is about promoting social progress and well-being. The main components of development are:

- Living a long and healthy life
- Being educated
- Having a decent standard of living
- Having the freedom to participate in one's community

Because people who live in extreme poverty lack choices on almost everything, the focus on simply surviving another day takes priority over the opportunity and choice to study, finding and doing meaningful work, and participating in either local and national politics. The importance of this pillar is most visible today through the [Millennium Development Goals](#)' efforts to eradicate extreme poverty. Close to one billion people today live on less than \$1 a day and 2.6 billion are estimated to live on less than \$2 a day.

The [Economic and Social Council](#) (ECOSOC) is the organ within the UN system most associated with achieving these goals. It is responsible for coordinating the development mandates of 14 UN specialized agencies and five regional commissions. In addition, ECOSOC consults with academics, business representatives, and more than 2,100 registered non-governmental organizations.

Education is an important component of development. When children are too poor to go to school, they lose the opportunity to develop their abilities to the fullest extent possible.

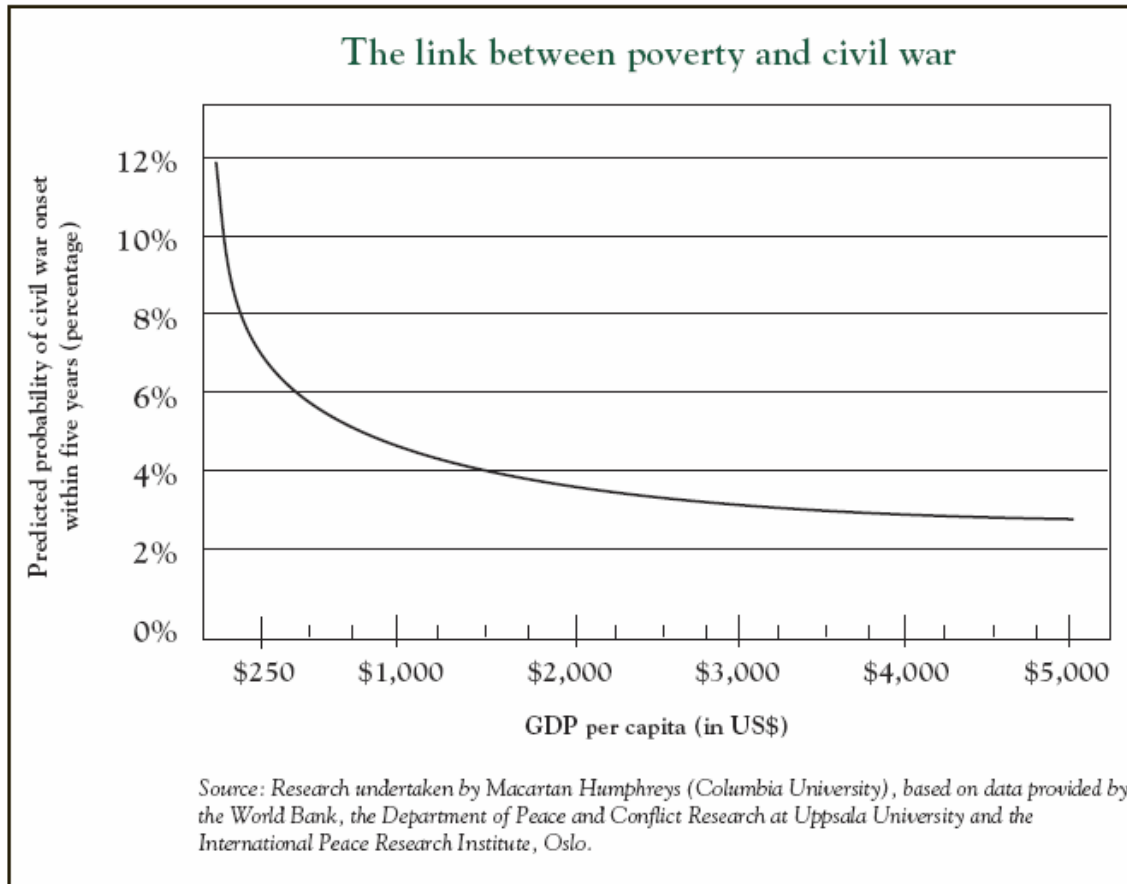
The fact that girls who finish primary school:

- earn higher incomes
- are less likely to become infected with HIV/AIDS
- have fewer children
- the children they have are healthier than children born to mothers who don't complete five years of primary school

illustrates the importance of education as a means of promoting social progress and well-being. Look at the [Millennium Development Goals](#) to learn about other factors that are important for promoting social progress.

In order for development to have a long-term positive effect, it must be sustainable. Sustainable development is another important factor connected to eradicating extreme poverty. The current attention given to the threats posed by global climate change is an example of how human freedoms and human development can be eroded when economic growth and development is divorced from environmental concerns.

Violent conflict, human rights violations, or a disregard for the rule of law can stop—and even reverse—developmental progress. At the same time, the lack of development can also lead to war as the following figure on the association between poverty and war suggests:



Countries that have a higher Gross Domestic Product per capita are less likely to have a civil war.

The strong link between human rights and development has figured prominently in United Nations deliberations for more than half a century. In 1986, the right to development was made explicit in the Declaration on the Right to Development. It states that "the right to development is an **inalienable human right** by virtue of which every human person and all peoples are entitled to participate in, contribute to, and enjoy

economic, social, cultural and political development, **in which all human rights and fundamental freedoms can be fully realized.**"

Teacher Handout 1

The student handouts aim to:

- Familiarize students with the three pillars upon which the United Nations was founded – Peace and Security, Human Rights, and Development;
- Develop an understanding of the connections between the three pillars;
- Familiarize students with the International Day of Peace – when and why it was created;
- Encourage students to come up with their own ideas of how to observe the day and work with others to support peace.

Here are some ideas of for discussion starters about each of the pillars and suggested activities to explore each one of them further:

Peace and Security

What is peace? Have students discuss in small groups what they think “peace” means. Then have each group share their thoughts with the whole class. One thing to look out for is whether students are aware that peace is more than the absence of fighting. It requires a respect for human rights as well as the proper social and economic conditions that would make it possible for people to develop their full potential. The second paragraph under Peace and Security (i.e., “Since its founding in 1945...”) in **Student Handout 1** summarizes this idea nicely. These issues are explored in greater depth in the Peace Education curriculum modules on the UN Cyberschoolbus (see **Teacher Handout 3** for links to these modules.)

What is security? The same small groups that were used in the previous activity can be used to explore what students think “security” means. After each group reports on what they discussed look to see if their thoughts cover the range of situations to which this term can be applied – for example, one’s personal sense of security, national security, global security. Introduce these different concepts into the discussion if they are not mentioned by the students themselves. **How are these different types of security**

related, what would be required to achieve each type of security? What do students think are the major threats to security today? As a follow-up to the discussion, have students read about security issues on the UN Cyberschoolbus website devoted to disarmament and non-proliferation listed in **Teacher Handout 3** on educational resources. Before ending the discussion, **ask students to discuss whether their understanding of the connection between peace and security has changed as a result of this activity. If it has changed, how has it changed?**

What causes conflict? Understanding the root causes of conflict is an important step to figuring out how to solve them. Students should understand that conflict is an unavoidable part of life and that there are alternative ways to respond that do not involve violence. **How are conflicts solved at school? Are students familiar with peer mediation programs to resolve conflicts? If so, what do they think about them? How can they contribute to maintaining a peaceful school environment?**

Human Rights

Have your human rights been violated? One way to engage students in a discussion of human rights is focus on their own rights. Have students read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (see **Teacher Handout 3** for links to the UDHR) and then discuss in small groups whether they witnessed or experienced the violation of any of these rights. If so, have them describe the incident or situation when this occurred.

Next, have students take the human rights temperature of their school. There is a simple survey they can find online to do this (see **Teacher Handout 3** for links to the survey).

What were the results and what recommendations do the students have to improve the human rights climate in their school?

Development

Most people don't realize that as much as 70% of the work of the UN system is devoted to advancing the UN Charter's pledge to "promote higher standards of living, full employment, and conditions of economic and social progress and development." Guiding

the work is the belief that eradicating poverty and improving the well-being of people everywhere are necessary steps in creating conditions for lasting world peace. The best way to study what the UN is doing to promote higher standards of living is to read about the Millennium Development Goals (see **Teacher Handout 2** for a link to the MDG website for youth). In 2000, the largest number of world leaders gathered at the UN to pledge their support to reduce the number of people living in extreme poverty – which is defined by the number of people living on less than \$1 a day. Many students don't realize the scope of the problem. **Ask your students what life would be like for them if all they had to spend each day was \$1. Where would they live, how would they eat? Then ask them to estimate the number of people around the world that are living on less than \$1 a day and compare it to the most recent estimate (980 million as of 2004). What about the number of people living on less than \$2 a day (2.1 billion)? Finish by asking them if they think there is a connection between poverty and world peace. If so, why?**

Conflicts in Liberia, Sudan and Afghanistan

After you have discussed the three pillars upon which the UN was founded have students learn about the conflicts in Liberia, Sudan and Afghanistan and what the UN is doing to promote peace and stability in these countries. Depending on the age of the students, you can have them look at the links provided in **Teacher Handout 3** or create your own handouts using information provided on these websites. Have the students break up into small groups to discuss what they think are the roots causes of the conflicts in Liberia, Sudan, and Afghanistan.

For many years peacekeeping operations involved monitoring ceasefires and separating the armed forces of those countries that were at war until a peace agreement could be reached. Today, most of the conflicts that the Security Council intervenes in take place within a single Member State. These peace operations are very challenging because they often involve sending peacekeeping troops into conflicts where there are multiple factions at war, where there is no clear victory for any side, or where one of the factions involved in the conflict is not seriously committed to ending the confrontation.

Peacekeeping troops are no longer deployed only when a ceasefire or peace agreement has been reached. Peacekeeping missions often have the difficult task of creating a secure local environment before a peace agreement exists and then to rebuild institutions, organize elections, train police, monitor human rights and perform other tasks once peace has been achieved. Explain to students how the nature of peacekeeping missions has shifted since the UN was first created. Then break them up into small groups and have them discuss the different responsibilities the peacekeeping missions have in order to maintain peace. Through studying these three peacekeeping missions students should have a better idea of the complex tasks that are required to restore and maintain peace in the world as well as a better understanding of its impact on civilians affected by armed conflict. During the conference students will have the opportunity to hear from students living in conflict regions where peacekeeping missions exist. It is our hope that a familiarity with these missions will encourage them to think of questions they want to ask.

Teacher Handout 2: Educational resources on Peace and Security, Human Rights, and Development

1. Peace education curriculum: <http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/peace/index.asp>

- Ecological thinking and respect for life (ages 8-12)
- Tolerance and respect for dignity and identity (ages 11-16)
- Critical thinking active nonviolence (ages 12+)
- Social justice and civic responsibility (ages 14+)
- Leadership and global citizenship (ages 14+)

2. Threats to security: <http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/dnp/sub1.asp?ipage=security>

This gives an overview of the major threats to peace and security with additional links for those that want to explore this issue further.

3. Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

<http://www.un.org/cyberschoolbus/humanrights/index.asp>

Offers a “plain language” version of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights along with notes, definitions and activities for each article of the UDHR.

4. Workshop on the rights of the child: A Perfect Summer Day

<http://www.cyberschoolbus.un.org/crc/workshop.html>

This workshop provides an excellent introduction to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Beginning with a childhood memory of a perfect summer day, students will transform their memories into childhood essentials. These essential elements will then be used to help construct rights for all children. The workshop can be easily used within a single class period or lengthened if time allows.

5. The Millennium Development Goals:

<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/mdgs/flash/index.asp>

At the United Nations Millennium Summit in 2000, 189 world leaders signed the Millennium Declaration which promises to free men, women and children from the

dehumanizing conditions of extreme poverty and make the right to development a reality for everyone. This website offers an excellent introduction to the development goals that countries around the world are working to achieve by 2015. The “Get Involved” section contains resources students can print out to start their own campaigns to support the Millennium Development Goals.

6. Peacekeeping Missions

<http://www.un.org/Depts/dpko/missions/unmil/index.html>

Learn about the origin of the conflict in Liberia and what the peacekeeping mission in Liberia known as UNMIL (UN Mission in Liberia) is doing.

<http://www.unama-afg.org/about/overview.htm>

Learn about the origin of the conflict in Afghanistan and what the UN is doing to promote peace and stability in the country.

<http://www.unmis.org/english/en-main.htm>

Learn about what the UN is doing to promote peace and stability in Sudan.

7. The International Day of Peace

<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/peaceday/resolution.pdf>

Read the original resolution adopted by the General Assembly that establishes a fixed date for observing the International Day of Peace.

<http://www.un.org/events/peaceday/2008/index.shtml>

This is the official UN web site on the International Day of Peace.

<http://www.un.org/apps/sg/sgstats.asp?nid=3230>

Read Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon’s message to mark the 100 day countdown to the International Day of Peace 2008.

<http://www.peaceday2008.org/>

This web site contains information about the Text 4 Peace campaign organized by the UN. Send a peace message by mobile phone or online and we will pass it on to world leaders when they meet at the United Nations on 23 September. This site tells you how to participate in the campaign.

<http://www.internationaldayofpeace.org/>

<http://www.cultureofpeace.org/>

<http://www.rootsandshoots.org/campaigns/dove>

<http://www.peaceday.org/home.aspx>

<http://www.worldpeace.org/peaceday>

Student Handout 2: Educational resources on Peace and Security, Human Rights, and Development and the International Day of Peace

1. The International Day of Peace

<http://cyberschoolbus.un.org/peaceday/resolution.pdf>

Read the original resolution adopted by the General Assembly that establishes a fixed date for observing the International Day of Peace.

<http://www.un.org/events/peaceday/2008/index.shtml>

This is the official UN web site on the International Day of Peace.

<http://www.peaceday2008.org/>

This web site contains information about the Text 4 Peace campaign organized by the UN. Send a peace message by mobile phone or online and we will pass it on to world leaders when they meet at the United Nations on 23 September. This site tells you how to participate in the campaign.

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