

UNITED NATIONS



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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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MESSAGE ON THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF NON-VIOLENCE

2 October 2009

Mahatma Gandhi, whose legacy this annual observance celebrates, once observed that “non-violence, to be worth anything, has to work in the face of hostile forces.” In today’s world, we face many hostile forces -- multiple and persistent crises that demand a response from leaders and grassroots alike.

Gandhi understood that a powerful idea could change the world. He knew that individuals, working alone and together, could realize what others might dismiss as impossible dreams.

Inspired by Gandhi’s life of non-violence, the United Nations today works to end violence.

We strive, for example, to rid the world of weapons of mass destruction. Our recent WMD campaign – we must disarm – sought to raise awareness about the high cost of weapons of mass destruction. Recent initiatives and meetings, including last week’s Security Council summit on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, have improved prospects for reductions in global arsenals. We must sustain this momentum, and press for success at next year’s Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference and beyond.

The call to non-violence need not apply only to the use of deadly weapons. The United Nations and its grassroots partners have long campaigned to stop the human assault on our planet. Greenhouse gas emissions have been part of this onslaught, and now threaten catastrophic climate change. I urge activists everywhere to turn up the heat on world leaders to seal a deal at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in December.

The appalling violence inflicted on women and girls throughout the world must also be at the centre of our concerns. An estimated 150 million women and girls are victimized each year. Rape is increasingly widespread as a weapon of war. Victims of sexual coercion are more likely to suffer sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS. I urge all partners to join my UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign, which aims to raise awareness and funds to fight this problem in all parts of the world – since no country is immune.

On this International Day, let us celebrate – and embody – the legacy of Mahatma Gandhi by heeding his call for a movement of non-violence. Let us end violence in all its manifestations, and strengthen our collective work for a safer, greener and more peaceful world.