

# The Governor-General of New Zealand Te Kawana o Tianara o Aotearoa

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Nga hau e wha, nga iwi e tau nei, tena koutou katoa.

E nga mana, e nga reo, rau rangatira ma, tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa.

Kate Smith, (National President), Wyn Hoadley (Chancellor Auckland University of Technology), Rod Gates (Pro-Chancellor, AUT), and Sir Paul Reeves.

My thanks to you all, for inviting me to attend and to open this United Nations Association Conference. It is a pleasure to be here. Last year I spoke to you about the United Nations in the 21st Century. Today I want to return to a topic that many of you may have heard me speak on - peace. I have chosen this topic because of the palpable importance of the issue in this early part of the new millennium. Reform of the United Nations remains critical, particularly if it is to be a force for good and for the promotion and the protection of human rights internationally. But it is again necessary to return to fundamentals - why do we have a United Nations at all? If it is not there to provide a vehicle that will engage nations in conflict and prevent violence in which innocent people will be caught up then what is the point of its existence?

The year 2000 was the international year for the culture of peace, and last year marked the beginning of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World.

There is inescapable irony in that 2001 also marked the start of the first major war of the new millennium. Until the events of 11 September, we had all hoped, indeed almost expected that worldwide conflict might be a thing of the past - that any new clashes would be regional and containable.

As a world community, guided by the consensus at the United Nations, we believed that we might be able to reduce conflict by focusing on the needs of the youth of the world - for education and better healthcare, for reduction of poverty and hunger, for a fairer distribution of the world's goods and for an improvement of their human rights generally. That way, we argued, new generations of children would be better equipped to live sustainably and there would be less reason to become involved in armed conflict.

Better-educated people might also mean a lessening of the tribal and religion-based conflict seen in many parts of the globe - in Africa and in the former Yugoslavia, in Asia and most recently, in the Middle East.

We now know that simply because we hope for a peaceful millennium, it will not necessarily occur. But that does not mean that the objectives of the Decade for Peace and Non-violence are now pass.

None of us is as yet able to answer fully the question why did the attack on the USA occur? But we do have clues.



The domination of western values, beliefs and way of life has angered many from the east and in developing countries. We in the west are seen as godless, as greedy and as uncaring about the suffering of those in the developing world. And to some degree that is true.

We who are well educated, and have enough to support our families, cannot easily empathise with those who are poorly educated and who see their children and old people routinely succumb to hunger and to disease. We in the West are seldom religiously observant to the degree that our forbears were; we see that as the mark of cultures that lack the independence of mind brought about by education, or the province of the credulous or the oppressed.

So just as the oppression of women or the enslavement of children in many societies infuriates me and many others, my godlessness and failure to observe religious custom and tradition enrages the fundamentalist, whether he be a Bible-belt Christian or a Muslim.

Tolerance is valued highly in westernised societies. It is not so widely respected in many others. The rights of the individual are greatly prized in the developed world, but in many other regions they are considered a luxury reserved for the impossibly wealthy.

So what then is the relevance of the Decade for Non-violence?

When a year is designated by the United Nations to mark a particular subject or objective, there will always be a sharper focus on the issue than in any other year. The international year for the disabled for example, produced many valuable improvements worldwide for those who are physically or intellectually disabled.

An international year will inspire many changes, often at the grassroots, and some of those changes will be of permanent benefit. It is hoped therefore that the momentum achieved during this decade will continue and be strengthened in the future.

Although the goal of permanent global peace seems unattainable, there are few who would doubt that we must continue to work towards making this a more peaceful world. And it is my view that we in New Zealand have a particular role to play.

We New Zealanders regard ourselves as a peaceful people. For many years now we have proclaimed this internationally, working to resolve conflict and to prevent new ones.

The Government has reaffirmed New Zealand's commitment to working for a more peaceful world. Our humanitarian efforts, in the form of support for UN peacekeeping missions and foreign aid programmes, and our long-term work for nuclear disarmament, demonstrate our strong commitment to peace and security.

Over 50 years since the Charter of the United Nations was drawn, we now observe a wider range of rights than the fundamental rights to life, to liberty, and security of person. We acknowledge the wisdom of the preamble to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights when it recognised that the 'inherent dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'.

We understand, too, that we cannot have peace if we fail to protect the environment. We can survive as a population only if we conserve, develop sustainably, and protect the world's resources.

In order then to improve our peace and security, we must address a diverse range of issues, including economic development, social justice, and protection of the environment, political equality, disarmament and human rights, and always, we must nurture democracy.

In addressing these issues, we have become acutely aware that the battle for peace is waged at home as well as overseas. Promotion of peace in the family and in the community is as important as peace



building internationally.

This decade has been proclaimed the international decade for peace and security for the children of the world. The United Nations has embarked on a series of programmes specifically to address the greatest problems that affect children. We in New Zealand have a responsibility as a nation that professes to love peace, to support these programmes and again to show world leadership in the care of our children. Only then can our concern for the children of strife torn societies ring true.

The United Nations General Assembly has had a leading role in promoting education as the key to the creation of a culture of peace and non-violence. We in New Zealand also believe that democracy is the foundation of a peaceful society. So we must ensure that our children are educated to understand the importance of democratic principles. Teachers and youth leaders need to be trained to value the principles of democracy and the culture of peace, and to teach and model it in the policies and practices of the classroom. And we need to continue to develop methods of peaceful conflict resolution.

If we are genuinely committed to promoting a culture of peace, as individuals we must look to our values and ensure that we all exhibit a peace loving life to our nation's children.

In the end, peace is achieved by tiny actions in our everyday lives. As Eleanor Roosevelt is reported to have said in the 1950s:

'Where, after all, do universal rights begin? In places, close to home - so close and so small that [they] cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet they are the world of the individual person; the neighbourhood he lives in; the school or college he attends, the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman, and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere.'

So the quest for peace begins in the home, in the school and in the workplace. Until we have delivered an environment that is conflict-free there we cannot preach or achieve peace internationally.

But we do have a role to play on the world stage. We may be a tiny country, but we can lead by example in encouraging education as a means of achieving peace and supporting democracy. We have our own challenges to meet in reducing violent crime, but there are also areas, such as protection of the environment, peace keeping and peace building, where we can, and do demonstrate leadership.

And here in New Zealand let us reflect on the symbolism of the tatau pounamu - the door of greenstone - the expression for an enduring peace, one which is often cemented by the exchange of greenstone heirlooms.

As Ngati Kahungunu Chief, Nga Rangi-mata-ea said:

"he tatau pounamu,  
kia kore ai e pakaru, ake, ake"

let us conclude a permanent treaty of peace, that may never be broken. Forever, forever.

Kia ora koutou katoa.

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