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The International Day of Peace

AnswerTips-Enabled

by *Greg Reitman*



The [International Day of Peace](#) was established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1981 for “commemorating and strengthening the ideals of peace within and among all nations and people”. Twenty years later, the General Assembly set the date of September 21st to observe the annual occasion as a “day of global ceasefire and non-violence... through education and public awareness and to cooperate in the establishment of a global ceasefire”.

This year, 2008, I had the opportunity to be present at the 60th anniversary of the International Day of Peace and to introduce my new film, ‘Rooted in Peace’ to the United Nations. Among the participants were 192 children who each carried a flag representing the nations of the world. It was also the 60th anniversary for UN Peacekeeping operations and its Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The International Day of Peace session was opened by United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who rang the Peace Bell at 10:00 am on Friday, September 19th in the United Nations headquarters accompanied by UN Messengers of Peace, Jane Goodall, Elie Wiesel, Michael Douglas, and violinist Midori Goto, appointed as the messenger of Peace that day. United Nations offices and peacekeeping missions around the world also held events to commemorate the occasion with a minute of silence observed at 12 noon local time around the world on September 21st.

To encourage even greater awareness of this important day, the United Nations encouraged people around the world to send text messages for peace on or before September 21st. Messages of peace were then collected by the UN who presented them to world leaders gathered in New York for the 63rd General Assembly held on September 23rd, 2008.

Conflicts rooted in grievances caused by systematic human rights violations, discrimination, marginalization and impunity manifest themselves long before violence begins. In a time filled with despair and gloom, from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to clashes in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and Darfur, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, destructive violence

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continues to pervade our planet. This year, 27 million children live in conflict affected areas and more than 25 million in displaced homes. With the advent of war, our world society continues to cause the unnecessary loss of life and destroy the basic building blocks of our modern society such as education, health and justice systems and the maintenance of law and order.

Millions of people have crossed borders as refugees or been forced to live as internally displaced persons within their own countries. Thousands have been victims of sexually based violence, a consequence of the lawlessness that prevails during wartime and, increasingly, a tactic used by warring factions. Hundreds of thousands of children who live in war zones are denied the right to education, while lose basic social services such as shelter, sanitation, access to clean drinking water, health care and employment. The rule of law collapses, taking with it other rights, such as the right to a fair trial, and giving rise to abuses such as torture. Freedom of movement is curtailed as checkpoints and roadblocks are set up by State and non-State parties to a conflict.

Worst of all, people are killed in violation of their fundamental right to life.

In addition to alleviating suffering, the protection and restoration of human rights by State and non-State actors has proven essential for the realization of lasting peace and the avoidance of relapse into war. The return and reintegration of displaced populations and refugees, the accountability for past atrocities, the rebuilding of the judiciary and other foundations of a democratic society are an indispensable part of peace efforts and post-conflict reconstruction.

The United Nations is at the forefront of helping these victims of conflict to ease suffering and restore the basic rights of a normal life. The UN also continues to build upon the significant progress made in putting into place international human rights frameworks to protect victims of conflict and prevent its recurrence.

Currently, more than 100,000 troops, police and civilians are deployed with 17 peacekeeping operations around the world, in hotspots such as Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the Middle East. The UN is undertaking political missions in Iraq, Afghanistan and other global flash points. United Nations civilian and uniformed personnel are working to create stability, prevent sexual violence, rebuild schools and health facilities, and ensure that refugees and internally displaced persons are able to return to their homes.

The World Day of Peace is a more than a time for fun events and celebration, its time of remembrance and a call to action. It's a time for each of us to make our own commitment of peace building in ourselves, our communities, our nation, and our planet. It has grown into a phenomenon of collaboration, meaningful conversations and an opportunity to reinforce positive change. It's also a time where each of us has the ability to take into action and to demonstrate what peace means to both individuals and to the world. In what is one of fastest growing social movements on the planet, the global peace movement provides a shift in consciousness that is real and happening now as a signal for humankind to declare for our universal desire for peace.

Guest contributor Greg Reitman is the founder of Blue Water Entertainment, Inc., an independent production company focusing on environmentally conscience entertainment. Regarded as Hollywood's "Green Producer," Reitman produced the 2008 Sundance Audience Award-winning feature documentary "Fields of Fuel;" wrote, produced, and directed the feature documentary "Hollywood's Magical Island - Catalina" and is currently in production on a new feature documentary film, "Rooted in Peace."

To learn more about Greg Reitman:

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