

Uniting for Peace Meeting on United Nations International Day of Peace

Rt. Hon. Hilary Benn's Speech on 'After the Conflicts: How Can Development Build Peace'

Report: Hur Hassnain

21st of September, speaking at the meeting on UN International Day of Peace, Hilary Benn thanked Vijay Mehta and Lord Peter Archer for their invitation to speak on this special day. He congratulated Uniting for Peace for their great work in campaigning and making the peace movement so strong.



Talking about interdependence and global harmony he said that we have to acknowledge that none of the conflict countries are very far from us. The human kind has now explored the fact that the earth is our shared home. Interdependence is the one word which describes human condition in 21st century and tells us that our neighbours are not just people with whom we share our street or town but they are our fellow human beings with whom we share a very fragile planet which we first saw when our fellow astronaut took a picture of this earth.

He shared that we live in a world where 65 to 70 million children works despite of attending schools, roughly every minute a woman dies in pregnancy, every day about 5000 children lose their lives because of predominantly dirty water and poor sanitation and one in 7 children in sub Saharan Africa never lives to celebrate their 5th birthday. Every year diseases like Malaria, Aids, HIV takes millions of lives. We live in a world where violence and its legacy is making it more difficult to solve these problems. For us the greatest sense of outrage should be this. We have a very simple choice as a world, either we say it's too difficult and we can't do it or either we act, either we close our doors of hope or we take our shared responsibility to build a more safer world for all of us.

Talking about the way forward he said that we should all become optimists because the power of human being is now coming together to act and the power of economic development and science to save human life is immense. We will fail if we could not realise our shared responsibilities. He referred the audience towards the impacts of trade and technology, migration and terrorism and the people moving from rural to urban setup in search of a better life and affects of increase in population. He said that the world population is increasing by half by next two generations and it will be very difficult to feed this additional amount of population.

Discussing the issues of violence and conflicts he said that we should look at the terrible economic conditions of countries who are in conflict. This is aggravated by British and French firms buying lands in the developing countries to secure their food supply. He questioned the audience that how we going to deal with violence? What we should do about the consequences of the rapid economic change and the inequality which are resulting in violence? Just imagine a world where people fight for water and food for their survival, he questioned the audience.

He said that protecting the natural and bio diversity is very important for our survival. We have now come to realise the consequences of jeopardising our natural world that provides us with food, air, clean water etc. He highlighted that the climate change is interdependent and our shared responsibility. Giving the example of Bangladesh where 140 Million lives are at risk, he said that if the sea level rises, they will definitely move to the neighbouring countries for a better life. This is how it is happening from a long period of time. He said we need to be honest and summon up the courage, energy and commitment to do something about it.

Referring to the correlation of development and peace he said that without peace, good governance, stability and order we cannot defeat poverty, climate change and resource scarcity. This is absolutely fundamental to the future of human being and it is important for all countries, he said.

Talking about the conditions of the fragile states he said that states where there is violence and corruption and where government is weak, conflict is much more likely to happen. Referring to the World Bank Report he said that one and half billion people living under fragility, affected by conflict, large scale organised criminal violence. These countries have not reached even a single one of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). He said that the central message is that the strengthening legitimate institutions and government to provide security, justice and jobs etc. is absolutely crucial to break the vicious cycle of violence.

About shifting the paradigm he referred to his work with DFID and mentioned some countries are recovering from conflict. He said that if we look at the figures of Mozambique we would know that they are making progress; their children are going to schools. More children are dying due to the legacy of the conflict rather than the conflict itself, but we should also acknowledge that humanitarian workers, governments, political and community leaders and general people are now struggling hard to change the world, he added.

Good Governance is not just about the rule of law it is also about being affective as a government. In a country like Democratic Republic of Congo majority of the people never ever experienced governance because they are dependent on their own resources and their own efforts to survive; so we need countries who are capable of doing this. State should provide opportunities for living, right to choose your leaders, get rid of them, right to say and be heard. He depicted the picture of number of countries from Arab League where people are on the streets calling out it is a universal human aspiration; it is not something confined to one part of the world or another.

He argued that we have a shared responsibility to bring safety and security to people wherever they live in the world. The question is how we enable the institutions like UN and how we build the capacity to all people across the world. We have to read the UN declaration of human rights. If we run away from this than we will have to face the consequences of the violence, he said.

Talking about the climate change he said that what happens to climate is fundamental to the kind of the future we have, there is a basic question of equity; finding a formula to balance the contribution of CO2 by every government is crucial. If we don't than we all have to face the consequences; CO2 is astonishingly interdependent, he said.

Talking about the optimism, he referred in the last 40 years life expectancy increased by quarter, In the past 30 years illiteracy fallen by half, in the last 20 years 400 million people have lifted out of

absolute poverty, we have beaten small pox and we are not very far from eradicating polio from the face of earth. If we look back these things were dreams. We have faith in our capacity as rational human beings to accept responsibility, he said.

We need to realise that the prosperity and right to development of people wherever they are, matters to us. We must summon up all skills, innovations, science, passion and creativity to apply to the great cause of this century, he said. The fundamental building block is going to be peace and stability because we cannot progress if we fight with each other. Closing his speech he wished every success to Uniting for Peace for their endeavours and thanked the audience for the active participation.