

Disarm News!

Mexico DF Mexico 09 septiembre 09

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The First Day

by Richard Garrabrant

Pace University student Akane Wilson grew up knowing about the terrors of nuclear war, from classes in Japan and stories her Japanese relatives told her about the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As a result, says Wilson, "The first day of the Conference was a powerful experience for me, hearing the Secretary General of the United Nations speak passionately about the need for global nuclear disarmament which my family knows so intimately."

In contrast to Wilson's experience, Rutgers University student Chinyere Ojini was not as well acquainted with the horrors of nuclear war before today's Conference. For her, hearing the presentations from the distinguished world leaders opened her eyes to the magnitude of the issue of disarmament.

Youth from universities in different parts of the world came to Mexico City to be part of the International Student Journalism program at the 62nd annual UN DPI/NGO Conference. Representing diverse cultural backgrounds including Japanese, Nigerian, Italian, Austrian, Indian and American, they all shared a keen interest to learn more about nuclear disarmament and what they can do to prevent war and violence.

On the opening day over 1,000 attendees were welcomed in the majestic setting of the courtyard of the 400-year old former convent of St. Hipolito by Under-Secretary General for Communications and Public Information, Kiyo Akasaka and Mexican Minister of Foreign Affairs, Patricia Espinosa Cantellano. The Secretary General of the United Nations, Ban Ki Moon, delivered the opening address emphasizing the need for complete nuclear disarmament among the nations of the world. He reported the shocking statistic that last year alone, military spending exceeded one trillion dollars worldwide. He further described his five-point plan for comprehensive nuclear disarmament and his hopes for global participation. All of these world wide efforts will be marked on the upcoming international Day of Peace this September 21st.

The Secretary General's points were highlighted in a video message by the President of the 63rd session of the General Assembly, Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann. A subsequent keynote address was delivered by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Jody Williams, the founder of the International Campaign to End Land Mines. Ms. Williams emphasized the need for world leaders and NGOs to set aside their individual egos and work together towards nuclear disarmament. Her comments brought marked applause from the audience.

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American student Melissa Rivera found the speakers to be new role models. "They opened my eyes about how we all need to focus on this most important issue of nuclear disarmament."

Following the opening ceremony, some of the journalism students attended the press conference given by The Secretary General, Under Secretary General Akasaka, and Mexican diplomat Miguel Marin Bosch

Among the questioners were this author, who asked the Secretary General to expound on his campaign for students to use social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter to spread the message of nuclear disarmament to their peers on their respective campuses. I particularly asked the Secretary General to explain how students in third world countries without computer access can participate in this worthy effort. The SG underscored the importance of grassroots participation by youth and suggested that traditional media like radio and print can also be harnessed. At a subsequent event at the exquisite Museo de Diego Rivera, the SG elaborated on his awareness program and took further questions from young people. A Fairleigh Dickinson University student, Chendil Venkataran, who was born in India, asked about what can be done by people his age to reduce tensions between India and Pakistan concerning nuclear power. This theme was later addressed in an afternoon workshop entitled "Eliminating Weapons of Mass Destruction and Dismantling Terror through the Power of Nonviolence."

The press conference was a unique experience for all the student journalists present to have a personal greeting with the Secretary General.

"Being so close to such an important leader in the world today was exceptionally moving," said Juliane Casey, a Smith College student. "He inspired me to become more of a leader on my campus to make my peers aware and more active about peace and anti-nuclear war issues."

The next event with the Secretary General and other dignitaries was held at the Museo de Arte Popular. They were greeted by a large group of student volunteers, outfitted in white t-shirts with the word Voluntario on their backs in large lettering.

After a few heart felt remarks the SG painted, signed and hung the final palm like leaf on a life size sculpture of the Conference logo, a grenade sprouting a small tree, a symbol of the Conference theme of disarmament. The youth in attendance were visibly excited to have the SG participate by adding the finishing touches to the unique sculpture they had helped construct all week for this event.

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Isaac Toussier, a native of Mexico studying at the Interdisciplinary Center in Israel, was moved by seeing the Secretary General surrounded by people his own age. "I am inspired by the demonstrable respect the Secretary General has for my generation and his hopes for what we can do for world peace."

Pace student Wilson was similarly moved. "The Secretary General's presence among us and his upbeat comments about our role in the future gave me a sense of my generation's huge responsibility as well as motivation for us to fulfill the dream of disarmament."

"The first day of the Conference was one of the most powerful experiences of my life," said Ojini, a senior at Rutgers University, a double major in Accounting and Journalism. "Hearing the Secretary General discuss the various treaties and the lead that Latin America has taken in disarmament has opened my eyes to the possibility of peace around the world."

Students were also extremely impressed with the SG's unique new twist on the acronym WMD, which he noted as highlighting the theme of the Conference: We Must Disarm.



Multilateral solutions to disarmament during the global financial crisis"

Hawwa Muhammad

In a region that is increasingly becoming an appealing market for weapons, Latin America is posed with the difficult question of how to promote peace through disarmament. The treaty of Tlatelolco that was created in 1969 with the intent of keeping Mexico free of nuclear weapons has made present day Mexico City the ideal place to host the 62nd Annual DPI/NGO Conference entitled "For peace and development DISARM NOW!"



The conference calls upon members of civil society, NGOs, and international student journalists to exchange ideas and create constructive forms of action in order to arrive at a world free of weapons. The complexity of this goal draws attention to the specific steps needed to arrive at the destination of a nuclear free world. Accordingly, the workshop entitled "Women, Disarmament and Arms Control in an Era of Global Financial Crisis" held at the ExConvento Corpus Christi on September 9, 2009 explored the complexity of this topic. At a time when the international community is confronted with a global economic crisis, the topic of disarmament and arms control begs the question of how a region can properly grow when the women of these areas are affected most. If a country favors military expenditures over proper social services, it robs women of their right to have a voice in the future of their country. Faced with high levels of poverty, women become victims of sex trafficking, among other activities, that unjustly rob them of respect and dignity while providing the necessary resources to live. The panel consisted of Delia Selene de Dios Vallejo, Marlene Acosta Jimenez, Frank Goldsmith of the World Federation of Trade Unions at the United Nations, Leticia Montes Rodriguez and Remedios Lagos y Castañeda. Remedios Lagos y Castañeda spoke about the double-sided effects of the Alliance for the Security and Prosperity for North America.

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This alliance, signed by former Mexican president Vicente Fox, former U.S. president George Bush, and former Canadian Prime Minister Paul Martin allows for the three countries to share economic growth, responsibility for the environment, and a common approach for security. In theory, these components act as a strong foundation for development and address problems of globalization. However, Remedios Lagos y Castañeda noted the threat that this alliance poses to the sovereignty of Mexico by making the country a target for terrorists due to their alliance with the United States. This situation is further complicated by the U.S. goal of installing a military base in Mexico.

Many issues were raised in the discussion period.

Members of the audience pointed out that four of the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council are the largest exporters of arms, namely the United States, Russia, United Kingdom, and France. In contrast, China is the world's largest recipient of arms.

Leticia Montes Rodriguez reported that forty-four U.S. companies account for 61% of the arms trade while 32 Western European companies account for 31% of the arms trade. The remaining 6 percent is comprised of Japan, Russia, Israel and India.

Marlene Acosta Jimenez urged members of the workshop to examine the problems of disarmament through a broader context of sustainable human development. This approach demands consideration of all facets of development, while emphasizing sustainability and social participation.

Frank Goldsmith noted the grave danger present social and political problems pose to women in particular, and advocated using the UN Millennium Development Goals as a starting place for solving issues of disarmament.

Delia Selene de Dios Vallejo cited Ban Ki Moon's morning address, stating, "Gender equality is not the end on its own. It is a prerequisite for all the international development goals including the millennium development goals."

In order to strengthen the foundation for a sound environment that will lead to peace, attendees agreed that there must be more concentrated efforts and social participation. They further agreed that education is the link to a more lasting future of development.

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Report on the United Nations Secretary General's Press Conference.

By Stephanie Salvador

With the International Day of Peace on September 21st quickly approaching, United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon is stepping up his campaign to get civil society involved in promoting peace through nuclear disarmament. In the 100 days leading up to International Peace Day, his campaign has been using modern technological means of communication such as Twitter, Facebook, and Myspace to communicate the message WMD, meaning We Must Disarm.



“I really want to reach out to young people by modern technologies, but that does not mean we are not using conventional forms of media. All possible means must be used,” the Secretary General told a crowded room of reporters at a press conference after the opening ceremony of the 62nd annual UN DPI/NGO Conference, “Disarm Now! for peace and development.”

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The Secretary General expressed his eagerness to involve youth, due to the potential impact young people can have on a future free of nuclear weapons and the threat of nuclear war. He further stressed that human rights and safety are basic human needs which the young generation has the potential to secure.

He challenged the young generation to invite their professors, parents, and friends to become involved in the effort toward global nuclear disarmament. "Challenge the friends you meet daily and ask accountability of your leaders. Let your voices be heard," he urged. "Without these efforts, nuclear disarmament is not possible."

The Secretary General is also urging governments of all nations to get involved in the effort. "Not one nation, no matter how powerful, no matter how resourceful, can solve this problem alone," he said.

The United States and Russia have agreed to work towards nuclear disarmament, he pointed out. On September 24th, President Barack Obama of the United States will chair a meeting on nuclear non-proliferation. In May 2010, the United Nations will host a five-year review conference involving the parties of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Such a review may require a change of the treaty to insure full participation.

He further noted that disarmament is not only a human rights issue, but a fiscal problem, with arms expenditures being excessive and unnecessary. Each year, a total of \$1 trillion worldwide is spent on war efforts. Such excessive spending, he emphasized, should be ceased, and the monies used instead to help those around the world in need of health care as well as those suffering from poverty.

The Secretary General acknowledged, however, that nuclear disarmament will not be easy in this era of technological advances where growth in the sciences have prompted the creation of more nuclear arms around the world.

The Secretary General's comments made clear his adamancy about creating a world in which people do not live in constant fear of nuclear war and his hopes that with the efforts and collaboration of governments, grassroots organizations, and youth initiatives, his vision can become reality.

A flurry of flashbulbs went off as the Secretary General came out from behind the desk and ventured into the aisle, smiling and waving before leaving the room.