

Geneva Peace Conference: Mobilizing Civil Society for Building Peace

**24 October 2014
Geneva**

Final Declaration

Humanity continues to face problems ranging from hunger and poverty to armed conflicts and all forms of discrimination, but these realities should not lead us to a sense of despair, apathy and hopelessness since a growing number of individuals, families, communities, institutions and civil society organizations as well as government sectors and intergovernmental agencies are slowly and patiently planting the seeds and nurturing the seedlings for the building of a more peaceful world, a world with much less suffering, conflicts and destruction.

The concept of peace is seen as an important element in the global culture of the 21st century and has led the Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF), Dialog Institut and University of Geneva Institute of Medi@LAB to hold a Peace Conference at the United Nations in Geneva, the humanitarian capital of the world. The date of the conference, which aims to find ways on how to promote peace, was consciously chosen as October 24, to coincide with the United Nations Day. The conference dealt with the role of education and media, which are seen as key issues for a better mutual understanding of different groups in society.

Seven years after the General Assembly of the United Nations proposed a bottom-up mobilization working to promote peace in the world, it happened in the city of Geneva, as the Honorary President of the JWF Mr. Fethullah Gülen, said. Building peace means building peace-loving human beings, the conference stressed. Further emphasis was put on teaching diversity as a means to raise peace constituencies.

As far as the theoretical framework of peace, Professor Johann Galtung's idea of negative and positive peace is adopted as essential for understanding what peace is and is not. Negative peace refers to the absence of violence and the absence of the fear of violence. Positive peace is the institutions that create peaceful behavior.

To attain positive peace five tools are suggested as *modus operandi* at a universal level: interfaith dialogue, justice and forgiveness, education (especially to foster intercultural understanding), forming negative and positive peace institutions and peace speech to replace the hate speech that is prevalent especially in social media.

An independent media is also listed as a condition *sine qua non* for social peace and harmony as inaccurate and falsified information can become a weapon in the hands of a corrupt government. This further highlights the need for a sensitive global community regarding protection of journalists and freedom of expression.

The Geneva Peace Conference addressed concrete examples in addition to a theoretical debate. The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement from Sri Lanka and the University of Peace in Costa Rica were cited as some of the best practices. Furthermore, the vital role played by religious leaders in Sierra Leone, Philippines and Indonesia were noted as powerful examples of religion as a key contributor in resolving conflicts.

The Geneva Peace Conference thus gave a strong sign to believe in peace efforts, are they small or big, in a world, which was seen in several contributions in a risk to do not enough in this field. The conference expresses its genuine commitment to stand against all forms of extremism and calls upon all stakeholders for joint efforts to advance the peace agenda.