

Tokyo Peacebuilders Symposium 2008
“Peacebuilding Experience and Knowledge from Asia to the World”
Co-organized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan
and the United Nations University
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Opening Remarks
by
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Your Excellency Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, Secretary-General of ASEAN
Your Excellency Mr. Kenzo Oshima, Senior Vice-President of JICA

Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to see you here, assembled in such a large number. It is a proof for me, that many people in Japan and around the world share the opinion, that peacebuilding and peacekeeping are the major issue that we face in the years to come.

“To contribute, through research and capacity building, to efforts to resolve the pressing global problems that are a concern of the United Nations, its Peoples and Member States” is the United Nations University mission. Peacebuilding is one of these pressing global problems. It is also a major challenge – both intellectual and operational - for the United Nations’ system.

Recently published research suggests that between a third and half of the conflicts in the world re-escalate into violence. The United Nations and its members have engaged in successful peacebuilding operations in the past – in Namibia, El Salvador, Mozambique, and more recently – in Croatia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda. However in other places the efforts have been fruitless. The questions therefore are - Why can some peace agreements be sustained, but others fail? What could have been done differently? Was implementation doomed by unworkable peace agreements? Was failure a question of unfulfilled mandates? Or were mandates inappropriate to the task at hand?

UNU scholars have tried to address these questions. A recent UNU book entitled *“Challenges to Peacebuilding: Managing Spoilers during Conflict Resolution”* (2007) draws upon experiences in Bosnia, Colombia, the Middle East, Cyprus, Caucasus, Kashmir and elsewhere, arguing that UN peacekeepers must be robustly equipped and mandated in order to be able to resist the so called ‘spoilers’. Another UNU book *“Unintended Consequences of Peacekeeping Operations”* (2007) analyzes the shortages and negative effects

of peacekeeping, advocates developing joint training and strengthening a culture of accountability among peacekeepers.

Peacebuilding can be successful only if it is holistic, comprehensive and sustainable. The difference between 'peacekeeping' and 'peacebuilding' is that peacekeeping is a bridge between armies – often it can be achieved quickly. Peacebuilding is a bridge between whole communities and populations – it is expensive, difficult, and it takes a long time to build. For success in peacebuilding, one needs not just soldiers, but specially trained human resources, properly educated, equipped and prepared for long missions. Therefore, developing human resources for peacebuilding operations is a necessary and urgent task, which is crucial for the advancement of UN peacebuilding operations. In various regions – such as Africa, Europe, and Canada - International Peacekeeping Centres have long been established to train military and civilian personnel from various countries together in one place, and in one language, to prepare them jointly to take part in UN peace operations. In Asia however this has not been the case, even though Asia supplies more than half of the UN peacekeepers. In late August 2006, in this same U Thant Hall where we gather today, the former Foreign Minister of Japan Mr. Taro Aso made an historical proposal - to establish the Hiroshima Peace centre with the aim of training civilian peacebuilders from Japan and Asia to participate in future UN operations. Japan launched this pilot scheme in Hiroshima - a city symbolic for peace - with strong support from other Asian countries, the United Nations, other international organizations and training institutes. The program started in September 2007 and today we have the pleasure of congratulating the first group of successful trainees from the Hiroshima Peace Center.

I am honored on behalf of all UN agencies in Japan which I represent, to recognize the successful implementation of this far-reaching initiative of the Japanese Government to train peacebuilders from various Asian countries and prepare them to join UN missions around the world.

We are also honored to welcome to Tokyo today an excellent group of governmental officials, scholars and practitioners from various Asian countries. They engaged in productive discussions yesterday, sharing Asian peacebuilding experiences from Timor Leste, Cambodia, Afghanistan and elsewhere – comparing the efforts of governments and civil society to build peace after long years of conflict. They worked hard during four panels in Elizabeth Rose Hall here at UNU (on the 5th floor of this building) and today we will be privileged to hear the four rapporteurs from the panels present to all of us the results of their discussions. We are curious to hear their summaries of the peacebuilding lessons from Asia to the rest of the world. Somehow we are used to hearing a lot from Europeans and North Americans and what they think about peace operations. It is time for experts from Asia – the continent that supplies the most personnel for peacebuilding in the world – experts from Asia to inform what are the best (and also the worst) practices in peace operations.

Let me seize this opportunity to inform you of a remarkable new project that the Peace and Governance Programme of UNU has developed jointly with the UN Peacebuilding Commission (under the Chair of Japan since July 2007). The project brings together practitioners and experts from successful past peacebuilding experiences in Africa, using South-South exchanges to develop human resource capacity. The aim of this project is to hear the peacebuilding messages from Africa and encourage more dialogue at a people-to-people level between African countries, rather than asking Europeans and North Americans to teach Africans how to build peace. The project will start with a workshop in Burundi later this year and will continue in 2009 and 2010 with workshops in other countries on the radar of Peacebuilding Commission. The aim is to visualize and utilize the lessons from the past missions and inspire and develop capacities, including human resources, in countries that currently need peacebuilding.

Excellencies, dear guests,

Today is a significant day, a day which will remain in the historical annals of the partnership between the UNU and the Foreign Ministry of Japan. We are very happy to announce that this Symposium is planned to become an annual event –the so called Tokyo Peacebuilders Symposium. It will be assembled every year in March here at UNU, with the aim of assessing forthcoming issues in the international peacebuilding agenda, debating various contemporary challenges to peacebuilding, and greeting every new cohort of successful graduates from the Hiroshima Peace Centre – in sum, with the aim of strengthening the human resource capacities of Asian countries towards the UN peacebuilding missions.

Please allow me also to use this opportunity to announce one of the reforms that UNU is planning for the near future. Today, when I tell someone that I work for UNU, one of the first questions I faced is ‘How many students do we have?’ And I always had to express regret that we are called a “University”, but actually that we do not have regular students. This uncomfortable situation prompted my determination that UNU should have its own students, and its own alumni, who will be proud of their postgraduate degrees – the MAs and PhDs degrees from UNU. UNU should be able to clearly say how many graduates we have, and where they are employed, no longer we want to apologize that we don’t have students. UNU students, as all other students, should one day be able to carry their diplomas with pride. And these UNU diplomas will serve as their ‘entry passes’ for jobs in the UN System - in the same way as the Hiroshima Peace Centre trainees (who we celebrate today) will be proud of their certificates when they go on the UN missions or similar assignments.

This afternoon we will widely open the doors of UNU for what we call the “UNU Open Campus” – another joint initiative with the Foreign Ministry of Japan and other UN agencies in Tokyo - to attract any passers-by to come inside the building and get acquainted with what the United Nations is about. We would like to develop UNU as a campus, open for all ordinary people, not to

remain an elitist research-only institution, as sometimes it has been seen in the past. We fully realize that this change of direction in the UNU is enormous, and it requires further vision, further leadership, intellectual and financial support - a massive effort. But we are fully committed and very glad to already hear voices of support from the Japanese ministries, and from various academic and political institutions from Japan and abroad.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express my sincere thanks to the Foreign Ministry of Japan for their excellent collaboration with the Peace and Governance Programme of the UNU to organize this Symposium, which we all hope will improve and promote effective peacebuilding policies and practices in Japan, Asia and the world. We fully expect the Symposium today, and in years to come, to create a platform for networking among practitioners, academics, civil society, and the media in the field of peacebuilding across governmental and non-governmental organizations, public and private sectors, and generations.

This is the beginning of a long road, but we are confident that we are moving in the right direction.

Please enjoy this remarkable event at UNU!