

Press release by UNESCO New York office

No. 2000-90

MORE THAN 60 MILLION SIGNATURES FOR A CULTURE OF PEACE PRESENTED TO THE UNITED NATIONS

New York, 19 September - More than 60 million signatures in support of a culture of peace were symbolically delivered to the United Nations today by children and youth representing all regions of the world.

The signatures to the Manifesto 2000 for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence were presented to the President of the UN General Assembly, Harri Holkeri, as part of the celebration of Millennium Peace Day.

Written by several Nobel Peace Prize laureates who met under UNESCO's auspices in 1999, the Manifesto 2000 lays out six basic principles for achieving a culture of peace: respect all life; reject violence; share with others; listen to understand; preserve the planet; rediscover solidarity. These principles correspond closely to the six values adopted recently in the final Declaration at the Millennium Summit: equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility.

UNESCO launched a global grassroots campaign to garner signatures for The Manifesto as one of its key activities for the International year for the Culture of Peace, 2000.

"Today, I have received sixty million signatures collected from around the world in support of UNESCO's campaign for a culture of peace," President Holkeri said in receiving the signatures from young people from Brazil, Colombia, France, India, Japan and Sudan. "All those who signed the Manifesto 2000 have made a personal commitment to transmit peace, tolerance and sharing into their daily lives."

"I really believe that you know deep down in yourselves how important it is to grow up without the fear of war," Nane Annan, wife of the UN Secretary-General, told the gathering of 800 adults and school children who filled one of the UN's largest conference rooms.

Referring to Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Mrs. Annan said, "All of you are born free and equal in dignity and rights, and we should act in that spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood."

During the music-filled celebration, children displayed sections of the mile-long "peace cloth of many colors," unfurled a portion of the 1000 metre-long peace poem written by people from more than 100 countries, waved miniature flags of all 189 UN Members States and rang a peace bell made from recycled weapons.

The First Lady of Colombia, Nohra Puyana de Pastrana, spoke of the ongoing negotiations in her country between the government and the guerilla movements. "With the support of UNESCO, we ratify our commitment to the peace process, delivering to this honorable assembly the Manifesto 2000 in which twelve million eight hundred thousand Colombians express their strong will to respect and abide by the basic principles within the Human Rights Declaration," she said, adding that she is leading a new program, Haz Paz

(Make Peace). "With it, we will promote new means based on dialogue, diffusion of values, respect of differences and tolerance to solve the conflict."

The governor of the Brazilian state of Rio de Janeiro, Antonio Garotinho, who has launched a peace education program that so far has reached 180,000 students and their parents, stated: "The great challenge to all peoples on the planet in the new millennium is to reconstruct the world, starting with men and women. This great challenge entails the global spreading of a culture of peace respecting differences of race, culture, religion and ideology. Only through true gestures of generosity, solidarity and commitment to life will we break the vicious cycle of violence."

More than 13 million signatures to the Manifesto 2000 have been collected in Brazil, while 30 million have been gathered so far in India.

"Non-violence is the weapon of the strong, not the weak," stated Betty Williams, whoc shared the 1976 Nobel Peace Prize with Mairead Corrigan Maguire for their work to end the conflict in Northern Ireland. "If we are to live in a non-violent world, then you, our children, are going to show us how to do it."
