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Intervention by

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Permanent Representative

***“Sowing the Seeds of the Culture of Peace:
Early Childhood Development is the Beginning”***

Your Excellency, Mr. President,
Distinguished Colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Permanent Mission of Bangladesh for organizing this crucial event again, and also for their long-standing leadership on the issue of culture of peace within the UN.

The resolution on the Culture of Peace gives the mandate to UNESCO to fulfill the goals set out by the General Assembly. During the 1990ies, under the leadership of Director General Federico Mayor, UNESCO became actively involved in post-conflict peacebuilding. As a former UNESCO Ambassador and President of the General Conference, I have stressed the power of preventive diplomacy using tools such as cultural diplomacy, education, science diplomacy and sports diplomacy. I am honored to have the opportunity to partake, from year to year, in this event, and share my experience on this topic that was never more timely than today.

First, I would like to touch up on the idea of intersectionality between *culture and education*. I believe that it is only through learning and appreciating **one's own identity and cultural heritage** first that one will be able to value other cultures, appreciate differences, participate in open-minded intercultural exchanges and embrace the culture of peace. When people feel secure within their own culture, they will be more open and respectful towards others and begin to incorporate the culture of peace into their own identities.

However, I feel it is essential to not only include the positive and joyful moments of our past in these educational programs; but also the painful ones. We must teach our children about the lessons of the past so that they grow up knowing the consequences of hatred, intolerance, discrimination and violence; and understand that tolerance is not enough. We need mutual acceptance.

Mr. President,

We must educate our children about the beauty of diversity, which is not a burden, but a source of inspiration. Education on **different cultures** is the next step towards establishing the culture of peace. Throughout my Presidency at the General Conference of UNESCO, I have focused on promoting the importance of exploring the vastly diverse cultural identities and traditions through education, so that they can grow up to not only tolerate, but to respect each other, to not to be afraid to engage in dialogue with each other, and celebrate our common, colorful heritage. *In this spirit, we have organized several successful events to celebrate the talent and colorful culture of ethnic minorities' culture, for example, the Roma community. In 2015, the Hungarian Mission hosted an art exhibit on the Roma Holocaust, aimed at learning from the past and instilling the values of tolerance and social inclusion in our people, and especially our children.*

Education can take countless forms; it cannot be confined to the classroom. We can teach our children about the culture of peace through a vast array of activities such as poetry, music, art and sports.

Art is a powerful tool for education and it has a tremendous impact on our children and how they internalize the idea of peace.

Similarly to art, **sport** has the power to bring together groups who otherwise would not engage in discussion with each other. Sport is a means through which we can shape attitudes and provide role models that children will carry with themselves for the rest of their lives. For example, this summer, Hungarians and people from all around the world came together in support of athletes during the 17th FINA World Championships in Budapest. The power of sport can eliminate social divisions and create an environment that values fairness, respect for one another, solidarity as well as equality.

As these values are building blocks of the culture of peace, sport becomes synonymous with peace. In order to impart these core values in future generations, Hungary has been working diligently to establish sports programs for children, such as **including daily physical education in the National Core Curriculum**. Celebrating the inter-personal and inter-cultural exchanges truly defines the spirit of sport in our communities. From a game of tag on the playground to the biggest sporting events in the world, sport can tremendously advance the culture of peace.

As we heard, the education of the mind of the young and old is an important aspect to achieve the culture of peace. However, it cannot be complete without efforts to bring peace through development, personal and economic, to our most vulnerable populations.

Mr. President,

It is psychologically proven that the most important physical, cognitive and socio-emotional developments of a person happen during **early childhood**. Basic attitudes towards the environment, such as trust, attachment and the potential for success are all defined before a child's eleventh birthday, and much of it takes place before school age. These factors define a person's way of thinking and reactions to changes, which define their future choices, their way of handling problems, and so on. We have to educate our children to talk, to communicate with others.

Recognizing this, Hungarian policy based early childhood in the focus of its efforts to ensure the healthy and beneficial development of a child, with special regard to disadvantaged populations.

Education starts with parents. In Hungary, parents can stay at home for 3 years with their newborn child, which allows them to create strong bonds with them, and help develop a relationship built on trust.

Our priority is to reduce child poverty and alleviate socio-economic disadvantages, thus contributing to the upbringing of a healthy new generation. Let me give some examples for best practices in this regard.

Within the European Union, the **Hungarian National Social Inclusion Strategy** is the only evidence-based programme combatting poverty that aims to integrate people living in extreme poverty through a comprehensive and horizontal approach that treats social and human rights issues from the aspect of social cohesion. The areas of permanent need, child poverty, regional disadvantages and discrimination are integrated into relevant strategic policy documents as main target areas of social inclusion. The „**Let Children Have a Better Life!**” National Strategy aims to combat the recurring cycle of poverty and exclusion by reducing child poverty at the earliest possible age and also by reforming the mechanisms and institutions which re-generate poverty and social exclusion.

The children's chance programme has provided opportunity for the improvement of the situation of vulnerable families with children through the improvement of local services and enhancing cooperation in the 23 most disadvantaged micro-regions. It provided support for the implementation of 2-3 year long, complex anti-poverty action plans focusing on children and based on local needs and values. An important achievement of the programme is the attitude change: the sound commitment of the local implementers working with the children and the families, the engagement of local decision-makers, the stronger supporting role of the children welfare service, and the increase in local activities.

Hungary has a strong programme in early childhood education and care. The **Sure Start** early intervention program was designed to empower families with children facing multiple discrimination, including Roma children under the age of 3 living in poverty and having limited accesses to quality services. Our goal is to increase the number of day-care facilities, available for children under the age of 3 by 136% in the period by 2018. For this purpose, the government allocated significant resources. Since 2015, kindergarten is compulsory from the age of 3 in Hungary, which helps alleviating disadvantages.

The Hungarian Government **supports social inclusion in public education**, promotes the disadvantaged, Roma children or children with disabilities in the Hungarian public education and higher education system and enhances their non-formal and informal learning possibilities, in cooperation with kindergartens and higher education institutions. The Government is committed to prevent and decrease the phenomenon of **early school leaving**, alleviate disadvantages and improve access to education for all, and vocational training in order to foster skills development.

To conclude, social inclusion, education and soft diplomacy are indispensable tools in sowing the seeds of peace in the minds of the future generation.

Thank you, Mr. President.