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## PRESS RELEASE

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### UN chief issues clarion call for peace, marking International Day

*Peace is a call for action: Ahead of annual gathering of world leaders, peace activists join Guterres' call for lasting peace in a fractured world*

**13 September 2023, New York**—As the United Nations prepares for its annual gathering of world leaders next week, peace advocates and activists mark the International Day for Peace, joining Secretary-General Antonio Guterres' call to “build, drive and sustain peace for all” across an increasingly polarized world.

“As we mark this International Day of Peace, people and our planet are in crisis,” said the Secretary-General in his message for the day, drawing attention to the unprecedented impact of the complex crises facing humanity - from conflicts, displacement, climate change, human rights atrocities to inequalities.

Today, a record number of people need humanitarian aid mostly due to conflicts and other emergencies. In 2022, there was a more than 50 per cent increase in conflict-related civilian deaths, largely due to the war in Ukraine. Basically, one quarter of humanity lives in conflict-affected areas, and many more people suffer from poverty, hunger, injustice and inequalities.

“Peace is not only a noble vision for humanity. Peace is a call for action,” stressed Guterres, who together with the President of the General Assembly, Dennis Francis, led the traditional Peace Bell ceremony and a minute of silence today at the UN's Japanese Garden to mark the International Day.

The two-day observance continues on 14 September with an event focused on mobilizing young people to take action for the Sustainable Development Goals - a set of 17 benchmarks, adopted in 2015 to address some of the most pertinent issues of our time, such as poverty, injustice and environmental degradation, to end human suffering and improve people's lives.

Joining the Secretary-General's call for action, award-winning actor/producer and UN Messenger of Peace Michael Douglas, who has rallied for global disarmament since 1998, will introduce the video of a new poem, “Peace begins with me,” at the youth event.

The poem, written by Pacifique Akilimali, a UN peacekeeper in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nigerian poet Maryam Bukar Hassan features Douglas and Lebanese singer Nancy Ajram as well as other peacekeepers and peace activists around the world.

Produced to mark the 75th anniversary of UN Peacekeeping Operations, the poem recognizes the importance of each of us, as individuals, being torchbearers for peace as part of a collective movement for change.

It pays tribute to the strength and resilience of people affected by conflict and those who help to protect

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them and secure sustainable peace in their communities, so they can rebuild their lives.

“We need to create a global movement for peace, one that empowers everyone to know that no matter how big or how small their contribution, they can make a difference in our world. Peace begins with every single one of us and, together, we can build a better future for all,” said Douglas.

“If we want to see a better future, we have to look at the actions we take today. It’s simple cause and effect - every single thing that I do has an impact on my future and everything we do collectively will impact the world,” added climate activist Xiye Bastida who will also speak at the youth event.

Since 2018, the UN’s ActNow movement has been central to the organization’s efforts to encourage people to collectively push for change, be it taking climate action, fighting for human rights or promoting solidarity.

Other guests attending the youth event include Nigeria’s DJ Cuppy, who has lent her influence to promote girls’ education, Kurdish photographer Niga Salam, whose work addresses environmental concerns, gender and identity issues, and the Grammy Award-winning Brooklyn Youth Chorus.

The International Day of Peace, celebrated annually on 21 September, was designated as a day of non-violence and cessation of hostilities. Commemorative events are being held ahead of the day as the organization goes into a security lockdown during the General Assembly high-level week (18 to 22 September).

The Peace Bell ceremony and the youth event can be viewed on UN Web TV.

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## **NOTE TO EDITORS**

The Peace Bell, which is cast from coins and medals donated from around the world including by children, is rang twice a year - on the first day of Spring at the Vernal Equinox, in celebration of Earth Day, and to mark the International Day of Peace.

The Department of Peace Operations’ Peace Begins with Me campaign recognizes the service and sacrifice of UN peacekeepers, past and present, and the resilience of the communities they serve. Join the campaign, using #PeaceBegins and tagging @UNPeacekeeping on various social media platforms.

The UN’s ActNow campaign aims inspire people to act for the Sustainable Development Goals. It was launched at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP 24) in December 2018, with a call from Sir David Attenborough in conjunction with the award-winning “People’s Seat” initiative.