

Geneva Peace Week - Opening Ceremony

Building Trust, Building Peace: An Agenda for the Future

30 October 2023, 16h30-1830 (CET), Auditorium Pictet, MdP, Geneva

Opening speech

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends

I have been invited to address the role of cities in promoting peace.

The future of humanity is undeniably urban. We are all aware of the increasing number of citizens leaving in cities around the globe; we are less used to think about cities when we think about peace.

Therefore, I wish to commend the Geneva Peace Week for its dedication to addressing this topic.

Let me briefly discuss two perspectives on the role of cities:

- 1) First: How do we move from urban violence to urban peace? How do we promote peace within cities?
- 2) Second: What is the role of cities in promoting peace beyond their borders?

On the promotion of peace within cities, it is important to acknowledge that violence tends to be concentrated in urban areas. Shockingly, over 80% of global lethal violence unfolds beyond conflict zones, with a significant concentration in cities. Yet, this issue often goes unnoticed, primarily due to discussions held at the national and supranational levels. Additionally, city leaders frequently find it challenging to openly address this concern and prioritize it on their agendas.

That said, city governments have a vital role to play in creating and maintaining an environment conducive to peace. Through community engagement, inclusive public policies, and governance system close to their citizens, city officials can lay the foundations for peaceful coexistence. They can invest in education, healthcare, and social infrastructure, ensuring that basic needs are met for all residents. By addressing inequality and providing opportunities for social and economic mobility, local authorities can reduce the root causes of conflict and contribute to a more peaceful society.

Furthermore, cities typically bring together diverse cultures and backgrounds. They provide an opportunity for people from various origins to come together, interact, and learn from one another. Cities can foster a sense of inclusivity which are instrumental in building peace.

In the context of armed conflicts, the violence impacting cities is of course of a different nature and scale. Allow me here to pay tribute to those mayors and local authorities who tirelessly strive to protect their residents during ongoing conflicts. We heard at the recent Forum of Mayors held in Geneva, how Mayors coming from regions where a conflict is ongoing, are faced with extreme challenges to protect their citizens while planning for reconstruction at the same time.

Local actors strive relentlessly to establish nonviolent, peaceful, and resilient communities and territories for their residents, even in the midst of ongoing or nearby conflicts and I extend my congratulations to the mayors who have joined the "Peace in Our Cities" and other appropriate peace and human rights oriented networks, demonstrating their willingness to publicly discuss this issue.

Now **on the role of cities in promoting peace beyond their borders**, I would like to start here by expressing my firm belief that we are not fully utilizing the experiences and know-how of local authorities and cities when it comes to peace-making initiatives.

Cities are laboratories where peace is built and sustained on a daily basis. And cities have a lot to share on how to move from urban peace to inter-States or regional peace.

Local governments can establish platforms for dialogue and mediation, bringing together diverse groups and encouraging peaceful resolutions to conflicts. They can foster partnerships between different communities, organizations, and institutions that promote understanding, collaboration, and cultural exchange.

By establishing sister city relationships and engaging in international cooperation, cities can contribute to global peace efforts. They can share best practices and learn from other cities around the world. Through these connections, cities can work together to build a more peaceful world.

The example of the association “Mayors for Peace” bringing together thousands of cities around the world is testament to the commitment and role of cities in promoting peace. It pleads for the total abolition of nuclear weapons through close solidarity among member cities as well as by striving to solve vital problems for the human race such as starvation and poverty, the plight of refugees, human rights abuses, and environmental degradation.

As the international community prepares for the Global Refugee Forum in December 2023, the event aims to demonstrate that peace often originates at the local level. It will explore bottom-up approaches to social inclusion in cities hosting significant numbers of migrants and refugees. The forum will also delve into the challenge of building trust in these cities and scaling up local solutions for social inclusion, mass migration, and refugee integration.

In Geneva, we are looking forward to actively participating in the Global Refugee Forum to address these issues. The Forum is an example of the importance of connecting cities to fora’s where global issues are discussed. And we can count on the support of the Global Cities Hub to that effect whose role is to facilitate relations between cities and city networks around the world and the various institutions in International Geneva.

Local authorities, although sometimes better positioned, often have fewer resources to support peace. I encourage participants to this 10th edition of the Geneva Peace Week to delve into how cities can be better empowered to act in conflict and violence-stricken areas and to foster urban peace. Thank you.