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Putting back the pieces for peace



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BY DZULKIFLI
ABDUL RAZAK

The International Day of Peace (IDP) is celebrated every year on Sept 21. This year, it is directed at young people — the generation that will become the leaders of the future and who will ensure that peace will prevail. In the words of UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon: “Help us to work for peace. You are impatient. You see what we, your elders, allow to persist, year after year: poverty and hunger; injustice and impunity; environmental degradation.”

This is an admission of the previous generation’s failure to sustain peace in all of its dimensions — emotionally, spiritually and physically. What is unfolding in front of us now is causing much confusion among the younger generation as to what kind of earth they will inherit in the future. For example, the weather is playing havoc like never before. As the IDP was taking place, millions in Pakistan were displaced by major floods; Taiwan was mauled by a powerful typhoon, Fanapi, the eleventh to hit China this year; and Mexico was battered by hurricane Karl.

Following each calamity, the trail of destruction affects many, especially the elderly and children.

On top of this, some 69 million children are reportedly not going to school in the world’s

60 poorest nations. They are “on a worsening trajectory as severe and deepening pressure from the economic downturn caused by the crisis of the rich world’s banking system bites into their budget,” according to a report by the Global Campaign for Education. It estimated that US\$4.6 billion (RM14.2 billion) annually would be lost from education budgets in sub-Saharan Africa due to the impact of the global financial crisis. That is said to translate to a 13% drop in resources for each primary school child.

Despite this, trillions of dollars are poured into wars, conflict and violence of all manner, be it in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kashmir or Gaza, just to name a few places. The “war on terrorism” remains unabated, wasting even more lives and resources. At the same time, we are constantly being startled by unbridled “freedom of speech”, aimed at inflaming and inciting at the slightest excuse, regardless of the larger consequences.

We have not even talked about diseases new and old, overt discrimination and injustice bordering on modern-day slavery, and a host of other divides ranging from simple gender issues to those of complex technology. Still, this barely describes the global turmoil we face.

So, it is no coincidence that this year’s IDP coincided with a three-day summit convened by the UN secretary-general from Sept 20 to 22 to deliberate on the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). There are eight goals agreed upon by world leaders in 2000, including cutting the incidence of global poverty by half, providing universal basic education, reducing infant and maternal mortality, and eliminating common diseases like malaria and HIV/AIDS.

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In other words, the goals are a noble attempt to put the world right – to rid “abject and dehumanising conditions of extreme poverty” and to “make the right to development a reality for everyone”. Very quickly, a decade has passed and most of these targets have not been met. Many look to be out of range by the 2015 deadline for the MDGs.

The reality is that we are nowhere near the desired targets. Although pledge after pledge has been made, the OECD’s official development assistance (ODA) figures for 2009 show that it only collected a mere 0.31% (US\$119.6 billion) of the developed countries’ GDP, which is not even half of the UN’s target of 0.7% of GDP. It’s even more dismaying when we consider the fact that four billion of the

world’s population still live on less than US\$3 a day.

The slogan for this year’s IDP is “Peace=Future”. Two truths seem to stand out: first, only in a peaceful environment will young people realise their full potential, and second, young people have the potential to start that peaceful world today. So, let’s get started.

In Malaysia, it is not just the youth who have peace and harmony within their reach, compared with others in many parts of the globe. It is therefore incumbent upon all Malaysians to take the lead in preserving the state of peace as part of our culture and way of life for the sake of the generations to come. In short, we need to be more civil in our ways and in nurturing the young as they put the pieces back together for a sustainable peace locally and globally. ■

Dzulkifli Abdul Razak is the vice-chancellor of Universiti Sains Malaysia