

UNITED NATIONS



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"200 years of peace in Sweden"

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**Speech by the UN Deputy Secretary-General
on the occasion of the celebration of the National Day of Sweden**

Skansen, Stockholm, 6 June 2014

**Your Majesties,
Your Royal Highnesses,
Fellow Swedes at home and abroad,
Ladies and gentlemen**

On 12 July last year I listened to 16 year-old Malala speak at the UN General Assembly. She is the girl from Pakistan who fought for all girls' right to education and who was shot in the head by extremists - but miraculously recovered. She spoke to the nations of the world, seemingly unaffected by threats, unwavering in her beliefs. She said, "one child, one teacher, one book and one pen can change the world." She was met with a standing ovation and many seasoned diplomats had tears in their eyes.

I share this story to remind us that nothing is a given when it comes to peace, development and human rights. We have the continual task of safeguarding our values and of working for lasting peace and a life of dignity for all.

This year we commemorate 200 years of peace in Sweden - since 1814 there has been no war against external enemies, and no civil war. This peaceful period is the result of hard work by previous generations who built our society on the basis of peace, justice and democracy.

2014 also represents another important anniversary. It marks 100 years since the start of the First World War. A war that was ignited by a political assassination in Sarajevo and that spread like a wildfire and led to mass death in the trenches of Europe.

The tragic experiences of the First World War saw the emergence of extremist political forces in Europe leading to a devastating Second World War and the Holocaust. The period 1914-1945 is one of the darkest periods in human history.

In 1945 the United Nations was created. In 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted. During the post-war years, leaders in Europe started the work of building a unified and peaceful Europe. Colonial empires were shaken and the peoples of Asia and Africa finally gained their freedom. When the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, it finally released the grip of the Cold War.

The following decades have not been as peaceful as we would have hoped. The conflicts in the Balkans and in Africa have been a tragic reminder of violence and bloodshed. Today, we are struck by the increased extremism and brutalization in the world, lately including the abduction of school girls in Nigeria. The Arab Spring turned into a stormy winter. The war in Syria is a humanitarian disaster and a liability for the United Nations and its Security Council, which has the responsibility for maintaining international peace and security. Rising inequalities are creating barriers between and within nations. We have not been able to make peace with Mother Earth, with the environment, which we are putting at serious risk. We have no Planet B.

Yet humanity has made progress away from poverty, disease, and human rights violations. The UN Millennium Development Goals have been effective tools for development. Next year, the member states of the United Nations will decide on a next generation of Sustainable Development Goals. 2015 will also be the year when the leaders of the world convene to make commitments to meet the existential threat of Climate Change.

In recent months we have experienced an increasing sense of instability. We have felt the cold winds of the Ukraine crisis spread to our neighborhood in Northern Europe. Now is the time for responsible leadership for national unity and a resolution to the crisis based on international law and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

The situation calls for vigilance, but also for calm and restraint. In turbulent times like these, we understand what 200 years of peace has meant for our country. Now, more than ever, it is important to stand up for international cooperation and security.

But we must also stand up for tolerance, equality and for an unshakable commitment to the equal worth of all human beings. To live in countries like the Nordic, where the promotion of peaceful solutions is our tradition, is a privilege. We have a duty to continue to build a Sweden that we can be proud of. To do this in a time of increased migration and heightened mobility across borders is a historic and demanding challenge.

In the future, the strongest and most vital communities will be those that receive and interact with their new citizens in a spirit of mutual respect. Xenophobia leads to fragmentation of society and division of people into dangerous categories of "us-and-them".

Sweden is a part of the global community - but the world is also part of Sweden. An open and tolerant Sweden is a richer Sweden. Building strong and fair communities is a contribution to international peace and security. We must also realize that the good international solution is in our national interest.

My years as UN Deputy Secretary-General have deepened my conviction about the necessity of international cooperation. That said, there have been situations where I have felt disappointment and frustration - when visiting Syrian refugees in Lebanon and meeting the vulnerable civilian populations in Afghanistan, Somalia and Mali.

But I have also felt much hope. And I have received much inspiration. From the UN Charter and the invaluable legacy of late Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld. From youths like Malala. From women on the barricades of the struggle for equality. From midwives in the maternity clinics of Africa. From journalists, who risk their lives fighting for the freedom of information. From peacekeepers and humanitarian workers on dangerous missions across the globe. Indeed, these role models and everyday heroes show us that we must never lose hope and never stop working for a better world.

Throughout these travels around the world, I always return to my roots in Sweden. I gain strength and inspiration – from family and friends and from the experiences and values that made our nation into a country to love. Sweden as part of the global community, but also Sweden as a mirror of the world and as a source of inspiration.
