

Geneva Peace Week Opening Ceremony Recap 2 November 2020

Geneva Peace Week has officially begun. This year is a brand new edition, moved entirely online.

We are living in a period of fundamental systemic change in global politics. Geneva Peace Week offers a possibility to understand the practical tools necessary to adapt to this change - adapt as an institution, adapt as a professional, and adapt as an individual. In this way, Geneva Peace Week provides inspiration for authentic leadership, clear vision, and alternative narratives about how to make peace real. Particularly now when we are even more separated from each other, in home office, working behind travel restrictions, and relying on digital tools to connect, we must continue to engage the fundamentally human practice of coming together and working together for solutions. In this way, we can build the new cross-cutting partnerships necessary to confront a changing world politics.

The Opening Ceremony streamed online from Geneva, Switzerland, opened with remarks from **Tatiana Valovaya**, the Director-General of the United Nations Office in Geneva and was moderated by Dr. Achim Wenmann, Dr. Claudia Seymour, and Danson Gichini from the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform.

The ceremony focused on the two central questions of “how we can rebuild trust after disruption” and “how to reset international cooperation”. The tone for the forum was set by a poignant narration by **Casilda**, a world-renowned storyteller, who reminded the audience that a seemingly small scrimmage caused by a little drop of honey can snowball into social disruption. The tensions arising in countries across the world and the ensuing interruption of peace are rooted in several interlinked problems. Remedying one problem in isolation from the others limits the potential peacebuilding processes to achieve results that can be sustained in the long-run. Moreover, the nature of these problems varies from region to region. In light of these concerns, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue’s Senior Advisor **Pierre Hazan** highlighted the pressing need to use different tools and approaches at different levels of intervention.

Often, establishing strong communication channels with the affected populations allows locals to suggest tools that they find effective. Given the diversity of these tools, Palermo **Mayor Leoluca Orlando** encouraged institutionalising a shared language for peacebuilding, such that objectives could be clearly expressed and acted upon.

The connections between international peacebuilding efforts and communities are offered by local agents of change, who act as credible intermediaries between the state and citizens. **Maria Luisa Silva**, the Director of the UNDP Office Geneva, thus called for sustaining support to local peacebuilders and investing in social cohesion in these troubling times. She further stressed that it is crucial to not let this crisis go to waste. Despite its many adverse impacts, it offers an unprecedented opportunity to bring about systemic change, put people at the heart of peace, and pivot towards inclusive policies and institutions based on human rights.

Similar views were echoed by **Paolo Petralia Camassa**, Deputy Mayor of Palermo, who noted that the trust deficits arising from the current crisis can only be bridged if the current generation asks itself ‘what can we do to build trust and peace?’ The answer, in his view, lies in young people approaching and becoming a part of politics, allowing them to become the change they seek in the world.

The significance of bringing the youth to the core of peace responses, such that they can assume key leadership positions and train their communities, was also underscored by **Marie-Laure Salles**, Director of the Graduate Institute for International and Development studies. In order to achieve this objective, she notes, education and pedagogical approaches ought to be reimagined to better address the complex global challenges of the 21st century. As the future decision-makers of the world, the youth needs to be endowed with capacities like dealing with uncertainty and prioritising collaboration over competition. These remain wanting in the present professional and vocational-centric systems of learning. Rediscovering deep courage and making the value of humanity resurface in today’s societies form the foundation for cultivating a culture of peace.

The panel at the Opening Ceremony recognised the need for a narrative change in the field of peacemaking, one that shifts its perception from the non-existence of combat to a broader focus on development and human rights. In response to this desired shift, **Ambassador Jürg Lauber** identified Geneva, with its rich mix of actors from many

categories (IOs, NGOs, Academia, Mission of different countries), as the ideal destination for different expertise and knowledge to interact. GPW's emphasis on the interdisciplinarity of peacemaking promises to reduce the imposition of ready-made models on affected communities, thus creating space for meaningful, context-specific dialogue.

Particularly as the world faces its second wave of the coronavirus and an evolving landscape of multilateralism, conversations around building peace are more relevant than ever.

This week, online participants will find both live sessions and a pre-recorded digital series across a spectrum of topics from cyber peace to environmental peacebuilding, and harnessing the economy for peace in a COVID-19 era. The program offers tracks with practical workshops and different ideas on "how to" build peace, showcases examples of initiatives and processes that are having a real impact for peace, as well as conversations about a new vision for peacemaking.

Explore the program today: www.genevapeaceweek.ch.

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The Geneva Peace Week is a leading annual forum in the international peacebuilding calendar, facilitated by the Geneva Peacebuilding Platform and its five organizations, the Graduate Institute for International and Development Studies, and the United Nations Office at Geneva, with support from the Swiss Confederation.

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