



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Organisation  
des Nations Unies  
pour l'éducation,  
la science et la culture

Organización  
de las Naciones Unidas  
para la Educación,  
la Ciencia y la Cultura

Организация  
Объединенных Наций по  
вопросам образования,  
науки и культуры

منظمة الأمم المتحدة  
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联合国教育、  
科学及文化组织

# UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION

Address on the occasion of the  
UN International Day of Tolerance

Address by  
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Royal Society of Arts, London, UK  
16 November 2010

*(Simon Cohen has said that this speech will include reading part of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's message for the UN International Day of Tolerance)*

Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am honoured to be here with you on this very special occasion that marks both the first anniversary of *Tole-rants*, and the United Nations International Day of Tolerance.

Today's event is truly unique in its kind, and I would like to congratulate Global Tolerance and the RSA Fellowship Programme for the initiative that they have shown in highlighting "global solutions" and bringing them to the fore to help make them a reality. I would also like to thank the organisers who have put together a fun-packed schedule for this occasion.

As a representative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, I am particularly touched by the *Tole-rants* initiative, not because I am used to ranting (*joke*), but because this is a perfect example of how we can harness communication and information technologies to spread knowledge and ideas, and to bring solutions to social challenges worldwide. *Tole-rants* are indeed messages of hope, and in a world characterised by diversity, they provide an opportunity to cross borders and to transmit *people-to-people* ideas free of charge, raising awareness to the virtues of tolerance for the social and economic advancement of people. Practicing tolerance and living

together in peace with one and other provides the basis of the mission of the United Nations -“tolerance” is indeed pronounced in the preamble of the United Nations Charter – and UN Member States have celebrated the International Day of Tolerance for the past fourteen years. The date, 16th November, is significant as it marks the founding of UNESCO during the aftermath of the Second World War, to advance the causes of peace and the welfare of mankind through international cooperation in the areas of education, science and culture. This year, to celebrate the International Day of Tolerance, UNESCO is leading UN efforts on the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures. This includes promoting standards for cultural diversity, promoting the benefits of constant exchange and dialogue across cultures and faiths, and building networks and coalitions to fight against racism and discrimination. Quality education for all is supported as a core means for building tolerance and inclusive knowledge, and UNESCO put dialogue forward in every instance as the path towards reconciliation in societies under stress.

What is interesting is that the words that framed the UNESCO Constitution over half a century ago, are no less striking today, ***“...Peace, if it is not to fail, must be founded on the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind”*** and this is extremely relevant to *Tole-ranters*, and to those receiving the *Tole-rants* messages. The practice of tolerance does not mean the toleration of social injustice or the abandonment or weakening of one’s own convictions. It means accepting that people – regardless of their origin, their situation, their behaviour and their values - have the right to fundamental freedoms, the right to live in

peace, and the right to be as they are. And this means adopting tolerance as an active attitude, communicating and finding solutions for others and for ourselves. Solutions to local and global challenges must be fostered by communication and freedom of thought, conscience and belief, as well as knowledge and openness, and these are precisely the principles that are upheld by the *Tole-rants* initiative.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Building tolerance in diverse communities requires time, communication and commitment and Global Tolerance is certainly sparking the beginnings of a worldwide movement of *Tole-rants*. Learning to understand ourselves, who we are, and how we can learn to live together with others has become a key component of today's communication and information landscape, and this is not just about communication and exchange, it's about connecting and sharing. Tolerance begins with the recognition of the differences of others as the same as our own, and is guided by mutual respect which provides us with a moral compass to ensure that no one is left aside –men, women and children from all corners of the world.

*Toleranters*, as witnesses of the “i-generation”, are a critical part of this picture, harnessing technologies for the communication of solutions, to spread the word of tolerance and multiply its effect. Like never before, young people of all backgrounds have the opportunity to experiment and innovate using technologies from cellphones to smartphones, from emails to tweets, from radio to video, from TV to MP3, from DVD to 3D, enabling people like you

to be empowered, to set the social and political agenda, and to share hope with each other so that those who were once ignorant of other cultures or immune to the joy and suffering of others around the world can now be connected instantly through digital highways.

With this in mind, I would very briefly like to tell you about UNESCO's Power of Peace Network (PoP). This is a broadcast and internet innovation, designed to support cultural self-expression, providing a platform for a global network to encourage local and regional youth groups, schools, communities and organizations from all over the world to share diverse life stories through the power of media and information tools (ICTs) and retell the stories that connect us all. Anyone can be a part of the PoP network and I invite you all to take a look at the website and of course to join if you feel it's something that you can contribute towards, or gain from: [www.thepowerofpeacenetWORK.com](http://www.thepowerofpeacenetWORK.com)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Tolerance is not only a cherished principle, it is also a necessity. Acts of intolerance, be it violence, xenophobia, intimidation, the exclusion and marginalization of disabled people, women, or religious and linguistic minorities – these all constitute obstacles to economic and social development, and hinder the application of peace, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Our work, therefore, starts from the principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect of all men and women. We must work to convince all that promoting tolerance is a question of survival –

the survival of cultural diversity, the survival of ecosystems, of languages, and of everything that makes each one of us unique. At its core, this means forging a common humanity, and this requires both the active participation of citizens, and a coordinated response by governments, regional bodies, civil society organisations and NGOs to work in partnership for the promotion of *“freedom of opinion and expression, and through education that encourages understanding, tolerance and friendship among peoples”*, as is put forward in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>1</sup>

I would like leave you with a positive insight from Buddha who said, *“Better than a thousand hollow words, is one word that brings peace”*. This is the very spirit of *Tole-rants*. ‘Impossible’ means that we haven’t found a solution yet, but with sixty seconds quite literally at our fingertips to *tole-rant*, we can build upon hope, understanding and tolerance to work together towards global solutions.

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I would like to thank Global Tolerance and the RSA Fellowship Programme once again for hosting this important event. In a world that is more connected than ever, where communication has never been so easy, and where the difference between the ‘local’ and the ‘global’ is but one click, tolerance must remain at the forefront of our thinking and action, and this event provides a key opportunity for all of us to mobilize in this direction. I hope that

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<sup>1</sup> Articles 18 and 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

between us we can spread these messages far and wide, so that the special 'T' symbol (*do the 'T' sign with your arms*) will inspire a global movement of *tole-ranters*, for many more messages of peace and hope to come from all corners of the world.

Thank you.