

The United Nations

The last Wednesday, 24th October, was United Nations Day. This annual commemoration marks the anniversary of the entry into force in 1945 of the UN Charter, at which point the United Nations officially came into being.

It worth quoting the Secretary-General's Message for the year's Day: "United Nations Day marks the birthday of our founding Charter – the landmark document that embodies the hopes, dreams and aspirations of "we the peoples".

Every day, the women and men of the United Nations work to give practical meaning to that Charter.

Despite the odds and the obstacles, we never give up.

Extreme poverty is being reduced but we see inequality growing. Yet we don't give up because we know by reducing inequality we increase hope and opportunity and peace around the world.

Climate change is moving faster than we are, but we don't give up because we know that climate action is the only path.

Human rights are being violated in so many places. But we don't give up because we know respect for human rights and human dignity is a basic condition for peace.

Conflicts are multiplying - people are suffering. But we don't give up because we know every man, woman and child deserves a life of peace.

On United Nations Day, let us reaffirm our commitment.

To repair broken trust.

To heal our planet.

To leave no one behind.

To uphold dignity for one and all, as united nations."

Surely we can all endorse those hopes and aspirations. The United Nations is of course a secular rather than a religious body and yet all these underlying principles are very much consistent with the Christian gospel – the good news of love and peace, justice and respect. Indeed they resonate with other faiths too.

Those well-known words of the prophet Isaiah heard as part of our Bible reading just now (Isaiah 2.1-4) in many ways sum up for Christians the rationale behind the united Nations: God "shall judge between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples; they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."

The United Nations does have its difficulties and its failures. That is inevitable in a body made up of so many disparate nations and ideologies. And yet it does so much that is good. For it is not simply a talking shop but active in many parts of the world to maintain peace and to alleviate suffering. We give thanks for those who devote their talents and energies to this noble cause.

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