**Introduction**

The International Youth Day (IYD), celebrated on 12th August each year, was established by the United Nations in 2000, as a means of raising awareness of issues affecting young people around the world. The theme for the year 2017 is ‘Youth Building Peace’, wherein the focus is on developing young leaders for a better tomorrow, which has also been reaffirmed by the adoption of Security Council Resolution (SCR) 2250 on youth, peace and security, which offers an important policy framework for peacebuilding interventions that meaningfully involve young women and men and support their leadership in peacebuilding.

On the eve of IYD 2017, the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MoYAS), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and United Nations Volunteers India (UNV India) held a National Consultation as a part of their project ‘Strengthening Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS) and National Service Scheme (NSS)’.

The National Consultation was organized with the following objectives:

- Gather the voices of youth involved in peacebuilding on issues of peace and sustainability through volunteerism as a way forward in relation to SDG goals.
- Discuss perspectives, challenges and priorities to support the active participation of youth, considering their diversity, social cohesion, conflict transformation and local and national peacebuilding.
- Share knowledge and information stemming from recent research and analysis on this topic;
- Generate a youth network that promotes the active inclusion of young people in peace and security processes at the local, national and regional level
- Explore how youth continue to provide innovative and sustainable ideas to address the development challenges through volunteering

**Inaugural Session**

The National Consultation commenced with a welcome address and introduction by Arun Sahdeo, Programme Officer, UNV India, who introduced the guests on the dais as well as those in the audience.

1. **Introduction by Mr. Arun Sahdeo, Programme Officer, UNV India**

   Mr. Sahdeo introduced the theme for International Youth Day 2017: ‘Youth Building Peace’, highlighting the immense potential of young people in the process of peacebuilding. He also stressed on the importance of involving the local community in any peacebuilding process, and honoring their knowledge.

2. **Opening remarks by Mr. Lalit Kumar Gupta, Joint Secretary (Youth Affairs), and National Project Director, Strengthening NYKS and NSS**

   Mr. Lalit K. Gupta began by thanking everyone for making time on the eve of IYD2017 to participate in the National Consultation. He lauded the UN for the theme chosen this year, i.e. ‘Youth Building Peace’. He reminded the gathering of former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan’s espousal of a ‘culture of peace’, and the joint efforts required of the government, civil society organizations and educational institutions to achieve the same. Invoking the preamble to India’s Constitution, he said it sums up what needs to be done to achieve a ‘culture of peace’ when it lays emphasis on justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

   Mr. Gupta brought out the salient points of the National Youth Policy 2014 in the context of peacebuilding. He iterated that the policy places emphasis on inclusive all-round development of youth, especially those from the disadvantaged sections of society. He said that to involve the youth in the peacebuilding process, it is important to not only promote social values among them, but also involve them in the process of governance.

   Mr. Gupta underlined the joint efforts of MoYAS and UNDP in strengthening NYKS and NSS. He expressed gratitude to all stakeholders of the project for attending the National Consultation, and expressed hope that the event would yield insights for the process of evolving a framework for actively involving youth in peacebuilding.

3. **Release of Action Research on State of Youth Volunteering in India**

   The esteemed members of the dais unveiled the State of Youth Volunteering in India Report 2017, the first of its kind active research in India. The research thrust of the book, its salient findings as well as recommendations were shared with all those present. The team behind the research and publication was congratulated on the release, amid much applause from the audience.
The first State of Youth Volunteering in India report seeks to understand the many manifestations of youth volunteerism in India and provide information on the depth and breadth of volunteer action, considering on-ground realities and good practices. It aims to establish a preliminary evidence base of the contribution of youth volunteers towards India’s developmental goals and provide recommendations for future volunteer engagement. It is meant to be the beginning of a larger discourse on volunteerism to ensure that this information can translate into tangible and far-reaching change, which will enable the post 2030 development agenda.

4. Address by Marina Walter, Deputy Country Director, UNDP India

Ms. Walter began by thanking MoYAS for their support to the event. She went on to share the significance of celebrating the International Youth Day and why the youth have an important role to play in pursuing the SDGs.

Ms. Walter spoke about the youth’s role in driving the sustainable development agenda and reminded all about the Arab Spring movement as an instance of youth involvement for change. She drew attention to the fact that Indian youth too are assuming the role of agents of change.

Hailing the country’s National Youth Policy 2014 as a very holistic way of trying to find ways to bring youth into the policy framework, Ms. Walter said that the country’s youth population - as high as 28% in the age of 15 to 29 years - need to be reached out to, and that it is possible to do so.

She spoke about the impact of the partnership of the MoYAS and UNDP and highlighted how Indian culture has historically been about youth participation. She explained that the present-day challenges of engaging with youth lie in being able to understand them. In this context, she explained the rationale of an online platform for volunteering, and lauded the government’s role and leadership in helping set it up.

5. Keynote Address by Dr. A. K. Dubey, Secretary (Youth Affairs), Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, Government of India

Dr. Dubey started by addressing the youth on how to make efforts that would yield desired results. He encouraged the youth volunteers to focus on work that is accessible by everybody and replicable. Only then he said will their efforts fructify in the manner they are intended to. He said the process of peacebuilding is a great learning process, and the efforts and experiments by every individual are of great importance. Each one of them is working towards a common aim, despite diverse circumstances and ideologies, and that is a peaceful life, with basic necessities, in an equitable environment, free from strife, with a vocation to support a family.

On the subject of the perils in peacebuilding spaces, he highlighted the problem of misinformation and non-information. “Today, unlike earlier, info is easily accessible, but harder to sift through. The difficult job facing the youth is to find proper and relevant information and make use of it,” he said.

He laid emphasis on the need to become acquainted with the civilians for any kind of social work to be fruitful. “It does not help to sit in government offices and decide and dictate top down what is going to work on ground in a particular geographical set up with a particular set of requirements”, he said. He added that volunteering can be strengthened if the youth identify with the people among whom they are working. One must speak to the local people to find out what appeals to them.

6. Launch of India UNV Online Volunteering Platform

The India Online Volunteering Platform was launched with the click of a button, and a huge display. It has been designed to promote online volunteering, which allows volunteers to develop their skills and take on new roles that their professional life may not necessarily provide. Volunteers can participate from any corner of the world wherein they can directly contribute in the development process. It is the success of the UNV Global Volunteering platform that led to the creation of the first country extension-India wherein a dedicated India page has been created to connect organizations with a pool of resourceful online volunteers.

The inaugural session of the National Consultation concluded with a vote of thanks by Arun Sahdeo, Programme Officer, UNV India. Mr. Sahdeo thanked the Government of India, especially the MoYAS for their support to the event. He specially thanked Mr. A.K. Dubey for sharing his experiences with the youth volunteers present, Mr. Lalit Kumar Gupta for his continued support to “Strengthening NYKS and NSS” and Ms. Marina Walters for her leadership and involvement. He thanked the state directors and
the UNV District Youth Coordinators who had traveled all the way to the capital to be present at the Consultation. He also thanked UNDP’s partner organizations for participating in large numbers. A mention was also extended to students and volunteers for their enthusiasm, as well as to media friends. Mr. Arun Sahdeo commended the hard work of the internal team of UNDP, responsible for organizing this event.

Panel Discussions

I. Youth participation for Peace Building & Sustainable Development: Representations from organisations & institutions working in peace building

The panelists included:

1. Abel Caine: He leads the Youth Programme at the Mahatma Gandhi Institute of Education for Peace and Sustainable Development (MGIEP) that comprises projects to empower youth to become champion educators for peace, sustainable, and global citizenship, and chief implementers of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

2. Jalil Mehdi: He teaches at Nelson Mandela Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution, Jamia Millia Islamia. His research interests include global nuclear issues, international conflicts and security issues, ethnic conflicts and issues of peace and conflict in South Asia and West Asia.

3. Seema Kakran: She is Deputy Director at WISCOMP, where she is responsible for the grassroots peacebuilding initiatives in Kashmir, mentoring of research scholars of peace and interns in the areas of conflict resolution, international law and non-traditional security.

4. Shreya Jani: She is the founder and managing trustee of Standing Together to Enable Peace Trust (STEP), and has been actively involved in promoting peace education at governmental and non-governmental levels. She was awarded Rotary Peace Award for her organization’s contribution in Kashmir and Manipur with youth and teachers.

The discussion was moderated by Neha Buch who is CEO, Pravah, and formerly a SMILE volunteer and manager of the organization’s Global Xchange program.

The moderator (Neha) set the stage by enumerating the important points for discussion and laying a structure for the discussion to follow. She highlighted the importance of talking about not just the visible conflicts in the society and international politics, but also everyday conflicts. She invited the panelists to share the successes and failures they have encountered in their work as peacebuilders and peace educators. Most importantly, she urged them to speak on ‘enablers’ they have encountered in the process of building their capacity in preparing for peace.

Jalil spoke about the structure of the conflict transformation and peace building course that he undertook and why it was crucial in building his skills. “The way you conduct a course has a profound effect on how a student views conflict,” he said. He also said that in an educational institution’s setting when people from different conflict zones socialize, they begin to see conflict more dispassionately, and can appreciate the others’ perspectives as well.

Shreya stressed the need for looking at peace not just as external absence of conflict, but also as inner stillness, fluidity, openness and willingness to accept others’ frames of viewing situations. For young peacebuilders, she had a direct message about failure in the path of peacebuilding, and that was “You will fail more than you will succeed; you will constantly get to know yourself better and you will transform the world as you do so...” She warned against using doomsday based pedagogies and curricula in peace education.

Seema started by explaining why WISCOMP as an organization involved in peace and security came to realize the importance of working with youth at all. She exclaimed that it is the young of a region whose behavior becomes decisive in how intergenerational
transfer of hate takes place among neighboring countries. Therefore, they should have the capacity, skills and values to counter war mongering, if they are to become agents of peace rather than of conflict.

Abel brought out the need for incorporating education based SDGs, namely 4.7 (education for peace, for sustainable development, for global citizenship) in the peace education curricula, and specifically 4 skills—critical enquiry, mindfulness, empathy, compassion. He shared that MGIEP is working to explore the media of ICT and digital pedagogies to create curricula to spread the message of peace far and wide in an accessible, replicable and fun manner, for maximum impact.

II. Voices from the field: Experience of youth working towards peace building

The panelists included:

1. Chintan Girish Modi: He is an educator, writer and peace builder, with a special interest in healing the misgivings between Indians and Pakistanis. He is the founder of Friendships Across Borders: Aao Dosti Karein, a peace education initiative. He also curated Tana Bana, an online resource for India’s diverse cultural traditions.

2. Kh. Samuel Poumai: He is the Director of STEP. He grew up in conflict ridden Manipur amidst militarization and violence based ethnic clashes, which motivated him to work for building a culture of peace. Since 2010, he has been working as a facilitator and trainer in Peace Education in Kashmir, Delhi and Manipur.

Chintan shared snippets of experiences from his various peace education endeavors. He highlighted the importance of peace in education when he stated, “I would like this discussion to be about how in the field of education and skill development, our focus has been on preparing young people for employment in the market and we haven't paid enough attention to the skills and sensibilities that are required for everyday living not only in conflict ridden areas but all over the world. These are things that are unfortunately not part of the education that we received in schools, colleges and universities.” He opined that the focus should rather be on:

1. What does one need to be able to listen well?
2. How does one resolve conflict?
3. How does one stay calm in the face of hate speech one encounters every day on Facebook/Twitter and all the other social media we are a part of?

Chintan grew up with the dream of visiting Pakistan, the one country he was made to think by other Indians was not worth a visit, making him want to visit even more. His first opportunity to visit came as part of his job as a school teacher, to escort the students on an exchange programme to a Pakistan school. He considered it his responsibility, after returning from an enriching time in Pakistan, to share the experience with Indians who might not get the same opportunity. He was moved by the gesture of Pakistani students’ warm welcome to Indian students by singing the Indian National Anthem. He started visiting schools in Mumbai to share the stories from his visits, through interactive workshops. He lays emphasis on sharing stories of friendships between Indians and Pakistanis, to juxtapose them against state narratives of animosity and hatred, to show that young people can promote peace, despite all the ideological persuasion otherwise. He said if Germany and France can have friendship cities, so can India and Pakistan. In his words, “It is important that we focus on the personal heartfelt transformation that can happen between people when they communicate”

Samuel set the context by introducing his home state Manipur, and his personal journey of growing up there. Manipur is characterized by a great deal of cultural and linguistic diversity. Politically, the state is wrought with divisive political movements and there are at least four outfits seeking separation from India. Samuel described the social fabric as very complicated and said that in such a situation, coupled with very heavy militarization, conflict and violence of all kinds are rampant in the state, and thus the youth need to be engaged in peace building, to positively impact their narrative and experiences.
He spoke about subscribing to stereotypes about different types of people within the state while growing up. Given the diversity, there were many. Later when he moved to Delhi for higher studies, he came to the city with a whole lot of stereotypes of people who were not from Manipur. Things started to change for him few years later, when he became involved in peace building activities and education himself.

He believes peace education is about understanding the main reason behind the issues in a conflict zone, rather confusing the symptom with the issue. He conducts workshops with children and youth in which he facilitates critical enquiry about the root causes, and encourages the participants to ask questions and understand diverse perspectives about the conflict. This engagement with the other ways of looking at conflict bring about change in behavior when faced with conflict. Samuel stayed in a Manipur school with young children, to interact with them about peace. He conducted workshops with them, and trained them to become peer educators themselves.

He has warned the students and youth volunteers present at the National Consultation against the dangers of social media in inciting hate speeches and thus conflict among youth. HE says that the same can be countered through peace education, as it helps put out positive messages to counter prejudice so they can correct others on social media.

**Youth Adda: Exploring the definitions of peace**

The youth groups present at the National Consultation gathered to reflect and share what associations peace holds for them. This was achieved through peer moderated group activities to experience how young people’s ideas come together and form something concrete to represent peace.

Through a coordinated string of repetitive movements with their hands and feet, the participants unknowingly created the impression of rainfall, dedicated to the spirit of creation through teamwork. In the same spirit, they headed to two separate groups for activities to explore what SDG no. 16 (Peace and Justice, building Strong Institutions) means to them.

Through an art-based activity, various themes and associations with peace were highlighted. These include music, friendship, positive thinking, and the color ‘green’. Similarly, a theatre-based activity brought out profound impressions of how young people experience peace, or its absence.