


# Cultivating a Culture of Peace: Celebrating United Nations International Day of Peace

Fordham University  
Saturday, September 21, 2024





The **United Nations International Day of Peace** serves as a catalyst for promoting peace at local, national, and international levels and stands as a powerful reminder of our collective responsibility to foster harmony and understanding in an increasingly complex world. The Brahma Kumaris (BKs) partnered with the International Political and Economics Department of Fordham University to explore the significance of this day and its theme for 2024, “*Cultivating a Culture of Peace*” on the day itself, September 21.



**Cultivating a Culture of Peace:**  
Celebrating United Nations International Day of Peace 2024

“ Peace cannot be achieved through force,  
but only through understanding. ”  
— Albert Einstein

**Offered by:**  
 THE BRAHMA KUMARIS  
*Know yourself. Renew your spirit.*



**Hosted by:**  
Fordham University  
International Political Economy &  
Development Program (IDEP)

## The Significance of the International Day of Peace

The **International Day of Peace** is an annual observance established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1981. Each year, the United Nations (UN) designates a theme that highlights pressing issues affecting peace worldwide, urging individuals, communities, and nations to take actionable steps towards fostering a more peaceful world.

### Event Highlights at Fordham University

The event at Fordham University brought together a diverse group of speakers, community and spiritual leaders, civil society, educators, students, and community residents, all committed to promoting peace in various forms. The program, featuring a thought-provoking **panel discussion**, stimulating **artistic expressions**, **interactive sessions**, and an insightful **keynote message**, was designed to engage participants in meaningful dialogue about peace-building initiatives.

After a few warm words of welcome by host, BK Carmen Palmer, RN (Ret'd), Coordinator of Brahma Kumaris activities in the Bronx, BK Sabita Geer, a Representative of the BKs at the UN, as the MC, then took everyone on this beautiful journey of cultivating peace.



Carmen Palmer welcomes

Sabita Geer as MC

BK Julia Grindon-Welch, a Representative of the BKs at the UN, gave a historical summary on the famous Peace Bell at the UN, which was donated by the Japanese Government to the United Nations. In 1945, United Nations Association Council member from Japan, Chiyoji Nakagawa, collected coins and medals from many countries. These were melted together and casted into the Peace Bell. Inscribed on the Bell are these words in Japanese characters, “**Long live absolute world peace.**”

Annually, on September 21, the Peace Bell is rung by the Secretary General of the UN and a moment of silence is observed. At the event, in accordance with this tradition, a similar bell was rung followed by a minute of profound silence.

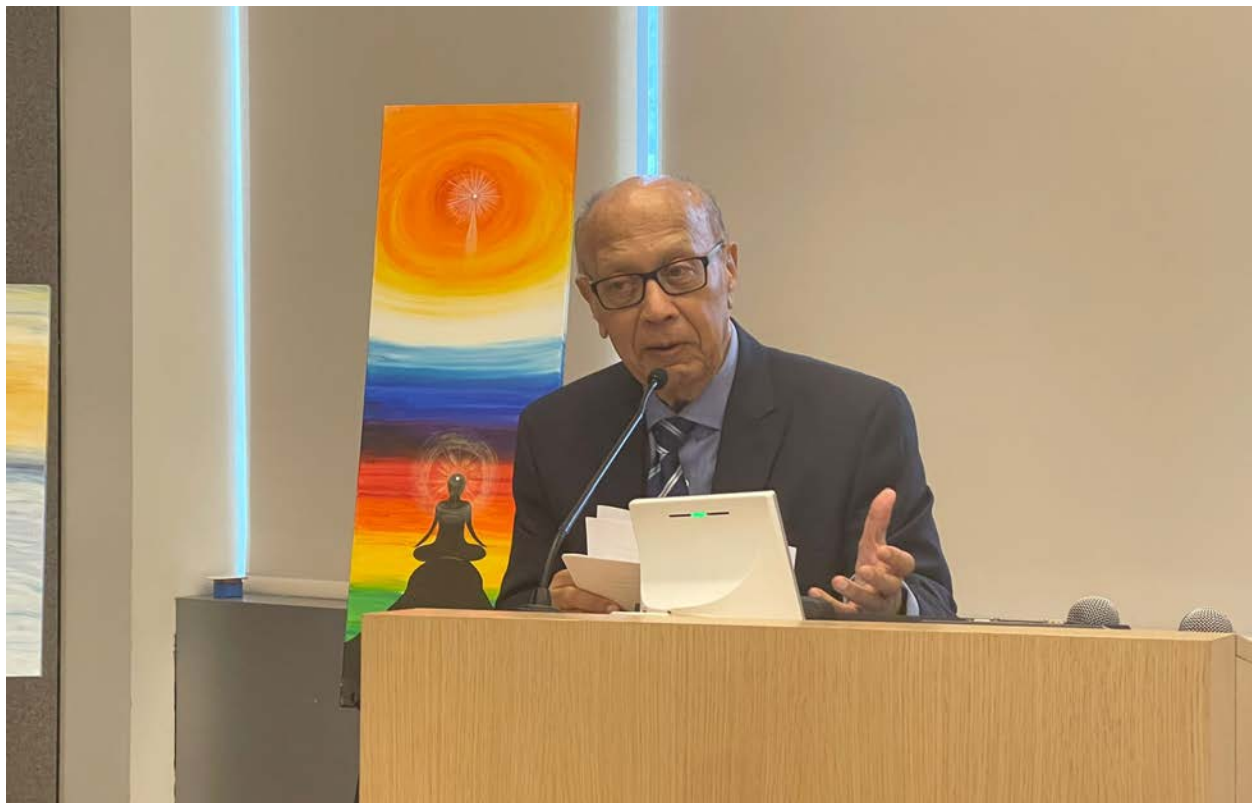
Coincidentally, the grandson, Tak Tanikawa, of the collector, Mr. Nakagawa, was present at the event, lending a special significance to this element to the program.



Julia Grindon-Welch shares about the Peace Bell

Tak Tanikawa with Julia

## Inspiring Keynote Speaker



Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury addressing the audience

The keynote speaker for the evening was **Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury**, former Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the UN and Founder, Global Movement for the Culture of Peace. His message inspired attendees to reflect on their roles in cultivating peace within their communities by harnessing the **power of dialogue and understanding**, as essential tools for conflict resolution. Here are a few extracts from his speech:

*“Simply put, the Culture of Peace as a concept, as a motivation means that every one of us needs to consciously make peace and nonviolence a part of our daily existence, to embrace the oneness of humanity and connect with the global community to show love, respect, care, and appreciation*

for each other. To paraphrase Mother Theresa who lamented saying that the greatest disease today is not cancer, it is being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for. Drawing attention to a different kind of poverty – poverty of spirituality, she said “there are many in the world who are dying for a piece of bread but there are many more dying for a little love”. We should know how to relate to one another without being aggressive, without being violent, without being disrespectful, without neglect, without prejudice.” He further outlined four mainstream actions to bolster the global movement for the culture of peace:

- **education - Education for global citizenship.**
- **meaningful equality and participation of women.**
- **empowerment of youth and children**
- **key role of cities and communities – safe, peaceful, and just.**

### Panel Discussion and Interactive Sessions



Panelists: Dr. Kala Iyengar, Rev. Nakagaki, Carol Gibney, and moderator Judy Rodgers

Moderator, **Judy Rodgers**, Co-founder, Center for Business as Agent of World Benefit, graciously leveraged on the experience and wisdom of the panelists. She asked questions such as:

- Describe peace as you understand it
- What is required for peace in a marriage and a home?
- What is the first step we need to take to create a culture of peace?
- How would we recognize that we are moving towards a culture of peace?

One of the questions that triggered a great deal of interest and in-depth discussion was “how can we have peace if we don’t have justice? Are they interdependent?”

**Rev. Dr. T. Kenjitsu Nakagaki, D. Min.**, Buddhist priest, President and Founder of the Heiwa Peace and Reconciliation Foundation of New York, shared that peace means a combination of the

Japanese words, 'hei' and 'wa'. These translate as 'inner peace' and 'outer peace'. When these are in balance, there is then peace.



**BK Dr. Kala Iyengar**, Director, Peace Village, Learning & Retreat Center, reminded everyone that peace is an innate quality of the self. The more we access this energy and allow it to influence our thinking, the better the chances are that we make choices that demonstrate peace and justice.

**Carol Gibney**, Director in the Office of Campus Ministry Solidarity and Leadership, Fordham University, emphasized the value of spending time with Nature which plays a vital part in assisting one to realign with their inner self, bringing one to that inner place of peace, once again. She also reminded us that to have a culture of peace, it is imperative that all, and in particular, our youths, are treated with respect and are listened to with understanding.



## Artistic Expressions of Peace

Surrounding the participants were artworks depicting peace in its various forms – peace within, peaceful environment, peace in action, peace in mind, peace in relationships. Guests were welcome to browse these displays which offered an experience of serenity and gratitude. These creative expressions were done by artists, **Shweta Takape** (IT engineer) and **Alla Schwalbenberg** (Lawyer).

The melodious songs by songwriter, musician and actor, and student of the BKs, **Nicholas Sattinger** on the keyboard, filled the room with love, lifting the spirit of all present.

Peace can be experienced through many different forms, especially through the arts and music.



Nicholas Sattinger, musician with some of the artwork in the background.

## Meditation for Peace

This vibrant evening was brought to an end with an uplifting guided meditation session led by **Dr. BK Kala Iyengar**. Participants were introduced to a technique that fosters calmness and clarity, demonstrating how personal peace can contribute to a more peaceful world. This practice, called Raja Yoga Meditation, not only helps individuals connect with their inner selves but also encourages a collective sense of tranquility among practitioners.

## Community Engagement and Commitment to Action

The success of the event was largely attributed to the active participation of the community. This grassroots involvement is essential for sustaining the momentum and generating networks for moving beyond September 21.



### **Conclusion: A Call to Action**

Let us commit ourselves to values that transcend borders, unite us in our shared humanity, and bring a culture of peace.



### **Voices of the participants**

*“It was a very relevant moment given the present climate in our country. The practice of Ms. Carol Gibney on how she was able to find a balance between her private & professional life motivated me to implement the same.” Izille Stephens, RN*

*“Celebrating the International Day of Peace with the Brahma Kumaris at Fordham University was an absolute delight. It was truly inspiring to hear from such a diverse and distinguished*

*group of speakers, who offered profound reflections on how we can each contribute to fostering a culture of peace on earth. Thank you for inviting me to be part of yet another successful event. It's always a pleasure collaborating with you!"* Danilo Parmegiani, UN representative of Legion of Good Will.

*"We should have this every year. My Ethics and Economics class will benefit from this conference."* Professor Dr. Booi Themeli, Director of Africa Rising, an international exchange program, Fordham University.

*"The event was lovely, and the spirit of peace prevailed in the room. The speakers were enlightening, and it was quite helpful to hear their different perspectives on maintaining inner peace and balance. It gave me hope, in some small way, that peace is still achievable— if not in the world, with each person who is amenable to peace.... because it begins with us, which was the mantra for the afternoon. Grace & Peace to all."* Carol Landrum, Pastor, Greater Love Refuge Ministries.



The Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University was founded in 1936 with Headquarters in Rajasthan, India. It comprises of a worldwide network in about 110 countries. The BKs is also a non-governmental organization of the UN accredited with General Consultative Status with the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). [brahmakumaris.org](http://brahmakumaris.org)