

## Transcript: Ambassador Anwarul K. Chowdhury, Former Under-Secretary-General and High Representative of the United Nations; Founder of The Global Movement for The Culture of Peace

**Summary:** Dr. Chowdhury is the founder of the Global Movement for the Culture of Peace. He spoke about the importance of incorporating early childhood development into the broader goals of both the United Nations and the global community, particularly in the movement for the culture of peace. Early childhood development and the culture of peace are integrally connected, and it is vital that we start send simple messages promoting peace for children. Dr. Chowdhury stressed the importance of promoting respect for different cultures and backgrounds. By respecting such difference we can become better global citizens, and being such global citizens should be an objective of early childhood development. He also highlighted the individual's capability to act as an agent of peace and nonviolence in our daily lives, and instilling these values in our youth. Dr. Chowdhury identified numerous UN priorities which may incorporate early childhood development, including Goals 4, 5, and 16 of the Sustainable Development Goals, the Program of Action on the Culture of Peace, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

**Moderator:** Dr. Chowdhury, so we heard violence begets violence. This questions the importance of early childhood development, but still there is only this little willingness to consider supporting the investment in early childhood development because there are obviously so many other needs to strengthen social cohesion, youth for example, land rights. There's so many drivers of conflict and some people are reluctant to consider early childhood development as a contributing factor. What can, what needs to happen so this changes? How can we ensure that early childhood development is recognized as an important contribution to peace building?

**Ambassador Chowdhury:** Thank you. I'm very happy that we have a full house here. I'm very delighted that all of you thought it appropriate to come and join us when we are discussing the early childhood development. So that shows the importance being attached here by all of you – there are member states, civil society representatives, UN secretariat people, and academicians that are here, so I'm very excited to be able to speak here.

To respond to our moderator's question, let me say that I would like to see early childhood development in a broader context. Unless we look into the bigger picture we can be misled or misguided or disappointed in getting the results of our efforts. So I'd look at early childhood development from a holistic point of view, and from a sustainability point of view. I think those two are very important in the context of early childhood development. I believe that that is only possible – to get a comprehensive, holistic dimension and a sustainable result out of our early

childhood development emphasis – only when it is linked to a broader concept of the culture of peace. I think the culture of peace and early childhood development are very integrally connected, and that is why it is very necessary to start with early childhood with very simple messages – messages where they are told to respect each other, to respect other cultures, other backgrounds, other issues that do not necessarily have resonance with their own thinking. So to respect difference is very important, and that will prompt us to become better what we call global citizens. I think this is very important: global citizenship should be an objective of the early childhood development.

I would like to emphasize that the culture of peace is something which can be initiated by each one of us. The culture of peace envisions that we, individually, can transform ourselves into an agent of peace and nonviolence. We are able to address the challenges of our lives through peaceful and nonaggressive means, and that is the essence. I think that it is very important to start planting those ideas, those thoughts, in the minds of children as they grow up. It is very important because if we try to intervene when they are in the universities or colleges, it's too late. So that's why I believe it is very important.

And then, the other dimension of this, how early childhood development – as a program, as an issue – could fit into the current work of the United Nations. I think one big area of that is the Sustainable Development Goals – SDGs. How early childhood development, ECD, can be built into the implementation process of various goals. It has very close connection with goal 16 on inclusive societies, goal 4 on education, goal 5 on gender equality. So these are very important areas where early childhood development can come in. The two other areas that I believe would also be an opportunity for early childhood development – one is the implementation of the Program of Action on Culture of Peace. This was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1999. I think now with every year having a high level forum on the culture of peace convened by the President of the General Assembly will offer a better opportunity. I think it would be a good idea if next year's high level forum can focus on early childhood development and the best interest of the child. The other thing I believe would be important also is the Convention on the Rights of the Child. I think this is another document which has been ratified by all the countries of the world except one, and this document has been accepted as the guideline for taking care of the children in their respective countries, also regionally and globally. So this is an important instrument for us. I believe all these things can provide a bigger opportunity for all of us, bigger opportunity for the United Nations, to emphasize early childhood development. I want to recognize the partnership of the organizations which have come together to make this even possible: of course, the Early Childhood Peace Consortium, the NGO Committee for Migration, Yale University, and of course the global movement for the culture of peace. All of them have joined and I would like to personally thank them for making this a success.