

**Laudation in honor of Cultures of Resistance Network Foundation – laureate of  
the Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello (13th edition), the UN High  
Commissioner for Human Rights**

*Distinguished Laureates, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

At first, please allow me to thank Villa Decius for organizing the 13th edition of the Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello. It's a great pleasure and even more an honor for me to be invited here to give this laudation.

This year, this Prize - in the category of nongovernmental organisations for active involvement in peaceful coexistence and cooperation of communities, religions and cultures – is awarded to Cultures of Resistance Network Foundation.

Cultures of Resistance Network Foundation is an institution that promotes peace, justice and sustainability. The main goal of the Foundation is to oppose war and support people from different parts of the world in their struggle for peace and justice. The Foundation is involved in long-term initiatives and concerned about directing human potential and effort towards areas like education, art and ecological agriculture in order to provide a better future free from violence and poverty. The Foundation also develops actions that address humanitarian crises.

With offices in New York and worldwide action, the Foundation was founded and is directed by an outstanding activist – Ms Iara Lee. It is with great pleasure that I take this opportunity to also pay the tribute to her. Let me mention just one of the stories from her extraordinary life. These few sentences will help us to understand how strong she is, and how is it possible to her to bring together change-makers from around the world. In May 2010, Iara was a passenger on the MV Mavi Marmara, a vessel in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla that was attacked in international waters by the Israeli navy, leading to the murder of nine humanitarian aid workers. Among the many people who

recorded the events on that ship, her crew was the only one to successfully hide and retain most of the raid footage, which she later released to the world after a screening at the United Nations. Ms Lee is dedicated to the support of Palestinian civilians who have been victims of war crimes committed by the Israeli military and who suffer from the Israeli government's ongoing acts of collective punishment.

The work of Cultures of Resistance is channeled through five project areas: "Make Art Not War", "Sustainability Not War", "Human Rights Not War", "Education Not War" and "Urgent Action". Their actions fit the Millennium Development Goals (which were established following the Millennium Summit of the United Nations in 2000, after the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration) and correspond with The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Within the "Make Art Not War" project the Foundation promotes artistic expression as a form of political, social or ecological protest - for instance music of protest, documentaries about problems of local communities, etc.

Just to give you an example: within the "Sustainability Not War" project, activities such as promotion of fair-trade for farmers and producers of the global South, and reforestation after the earthquake in Haiti are being carried out. Their targets are clearly the same as second goal from the 2030 Agenda: to end hunger, to achieve food security and improved nutrition, and to promote sustainable agriculture in order to end all forms of malnutrition. Many other entities recognize the importance of such activities. Enough to mention the important role and inclusive nature of the Committee on World Food Security or the Rome Declaration on Nutrition and Framework for Action.

The "Human Rights Not War" project supports, among others, indigenous peoples in their struggle to secure their rights over their land in Brazil, as well as nonviolent Syrian activists. One of the last actions undertaken by the Foundation in this area fits directly the policy of the UNCHR. They noticed that Syrians feel it is useless to engage with the media, because so far so little has resulted from it. That's why

Cultures of Resistance Network is trying to create support systems. They bought cameras and bulletproof vests and sent them to Syria for activists to keep reporting. Now they are using the footage to raise funds to send more medicines to Syria.

Politicians and diplomats see how important it is to constantly inform the public about conflicts in the likes of the Syrian Crisis. They stressed that in the last Political Declaration on meeting at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 19 September 2016. Like UN refugee chief Filippo Grandi said two months ago: "As the international community considers how best to deal with the refugee crisis, it is essential that we think about and beyond basic survival". It was also highlighted in UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon's speech on the occasion of the Meeting at the United Nations on 21 September 2016, "I challenge everyone to use their influence now to restore a cessation of hostilities, enable humanitarian assistance everywhere it is needed, and support the UN in charting a political path for the Syrians to negotiate a way out the hell in which they are trapped"

Filippo Grandi said also that education enables refugees to positively shape the future of both their countries of asylum and their home countries when they one day return. These words explain exactly why another of the Foundation's projects, "Education not War", is so important. The UN refugee agency said in a report from September that fewer than half of the world's some 6 million refugee children receive school education, making them five times less likely to get an education than the global average. A full 3.7 million school-aged refugee children have no school to go to.

Within the "Education Not War project" one should highlight the scholarships for studies in Violence, Conflicts and Development in the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, for members of communities affected by conflicts and poverty (from Bangladesh, Myanmar, Democratic Republic of Congo, etc.).

As regards the "Urgent Action project", Cultures of Resistance is supporting the independence of the Sahrawi people and a campaign to provide better conditions for Pakistani porters. In this context, Iara Lee has produced the film "K2 and the Invisible Footmen", which has been displayed and - I hope – will be screened again in Poland.

The actions of the Foundation in the quest for peace, justice and dignity for people of different ethnicities, religions and cultures, especially excluded communities, meet the principles promoted by Sergio Vieira de Mello and the United Nations. The Network, connecting local communities and social activists from different parts of the Globe, creates a platform for cooperation and support, making the voice of minorities heard.

Thanks to their work we can see a growing number of people who committed their lives to promoting change. From Iran, where graffiti and rap became tools in fighting government repression, to Myanmar, where monks acting in the tradition of Gandhi are taking on a dictatorship, to Brazil, where musicians reach out to slum kids and convert guns into guitars, to Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, where photography, music and film have given a voice to those rarely heard, Cultures of resistance explores how art and creativity can be ammunition in the battle for peace and justice.

In closing, I want to highlight one particular thing I learned from the Foundation's work - we have a tremendous amount of potential in the world and those of us here have a tremendous amount of potential to impact the world. Please allow me to quote here some of their own words:

*“Worldwide, people from all walks of life are finding creative ways to oppose war and promote peace, justice, and sustainability. Culture — including film, music, and food—is a fertile terrain for this struggle. Education that nourishes a critical mind and fortifies the soul is just as essential.”*

Ms Director, I wish you and the whole Cultures of Resistance Network Foundation further success in your future endeavours and hope that the Polish Prize of Sérgio Vieira de Mello will serve as valuable support and acknowledgement of your work.