

United Nations International Day of Peace – Guide for Teachers (Part I of II)

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The International Day of Peace, observed every year on 21 September, is a United Nations day dedicated to strengthening the ideals of peace among and within all nations and peoples.

1981 — The Day is established

The history of the International Day of Peace begins in 1981, when the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 36/67 on 30 November. The resolution proclaimed the third Tuesday of September, which was the opening day of the General Assembly's annual regular session, as the International Day of Peace. Its purpose was to commemorate and strengthen the ideals of peace around the world.

The resolution also encouraged governments, UN organizations, regional organizations, NGOs, communities and individuals to commemorate the day, particularly through education and public awareness.

1982 — First observance

The first International Day of Peace was observed in September 1982. At this stage, the date was tied to the opening of the General Assembly rather than being fixed to a particular calendar date.

In 1998, the General Assembly reaffirmed that the International Day of Peace should continue to be observed on the opening day of its annual regular session.

A major change came in 2001. On 7 September, the General Assembly unanimously adopted Resolution 55/282, deciding that, beginning in 2002, the International Day of Peace would be observed every year on 21 September.

The resolution also gave the Day a stronger practical meaning: it declared it a day of global ceasefire and non-violence, inviting nations and people to observe a cessation of hostilities for the duration of the Day.

Today, the International Day of Peace serves both as a reminder of the UN's commitment to peace and as a call for action. The UN encourages people around the world to promote non-violence, dialogue, tolerance, education and cooperation, while drawing attention to conflicts and the conditions that can undermine peace.

1981: UN General Assembly establishes the International Day of Peace through Resolution 36/67.

1982: The first International Day of Peace is observed.

1998: The General Assembly reaffirms the Day's observance alongside the opening of its annual session.

2001: Resolution 55/282 fixes 21 September as the annual date and establishes the Day as one of global ceasefire and non-violence.

2002 onward: 21 September is observed annually as the International Day of Peace.

The **United Nations International Day of Peace**, commonly known as **Peace Day**, is observed every year on **21 September**. It is dedicated to strengthening the ideals of peace, both within and among all nations and peoples.

1. Establishment of the Day

The International Day of Peace was established by the **United Nations General Assembly in 1981** through Resolution 36/67. The day was originally observed on the **third Tuesday of September**, coinciding with the opening of the General Assembly's annual session.

In **2001**, the General Assembly adopted Resolution 55/282, which established **21 September** as the permanent date for the International Day of Peace. The resolution called for the observance to be a day of **global ceasefire and non-violence**.

The first International Day of Peace observed on the fixed date of 21 September took place in **2002**.

The day encourages countries, organizations, and individuals to:

- Promote peace and non-violence.
- Prevent and resolve conflicts.
- Respect human rights and human dignity.
- Encourage dialogue and understanding between peoples.
- Support efforts to end wars and armed conflicts.
- Reflect on the importance of peace in communities and around the world.

A well-known symbol of the day is the **UN Peace Bell**, located at United Nations Headquarters in New York. It is traditionally rung on or around 21 September to call attention to the need for peace.

The bell was made from coins and medals donated by people from many countries, symbolizing the shared desire of humanity for peace.

Each year, the United Nations chooses a theme highlighting an important aspect of peace. These themes have addressed issues such as **climate change, human rights, racism, education, and the importance of building peaceful societies**.

The International Day of Peace reminds the world that peace is more than simply the absence of war. It also involves **justice, equality, human rights, tolerance, cooperation, and peaceful relationships among individuals and nations**.

In conclusion, the UN International Day of Peace was created to encourage the world to work toward peaceful solutions to conflicts. Since its establishment in 1981, and especially since 21 September became its permanent date in 2001, it has become an important annual occasion for promoting peace, non-violence, and international cooperation.



The **United Nations Peace Bell** is one of the most recognizable symbols of peace at the United Nations Headquarters in New York. It represents the hope of people around the world for lasting peace and an end to war.

The Peace Bell was **donated to the United Nations by the United Nations Association of Japan in 1954**. It was presented by **Chiyoji Nagakawa**, a Japanese counsellor to the UN, on behalf of the association.

The bell was made from **coins and medals donated by representatives of UN member states, the Pope, and people from more than 60 countries**. These contributions symbolize the unity of people and nations in their desire for peace.

The bell is housed in a traditional Japanese-style structure made from **cypress wood**, with a roof resembling a small shrine. An inscription on the bell reads **“Long live absolute world peace.”**

The bell is traditionally rung **twice a year**:

- On **21 September**, during the observance of the **International Day of Peace**.
- Around the beginning of the annual session of the UN General Assembly.

The ringing of the bell serves as a reminder of the devastating effects of war and the responsibility of nations to pursue peaceful solutions to international disputes.

The Peace Bell is particularly meaningful because Japan experienced the destruction of the Second World War, including the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Its message therefore carries a strong association with the desire for **peace, reconciliation, and the elimination of war**.

In summary, the UN Peace Bell is more than a physical bell. It is a symbol of humanity's collective aspiration for a peaceful world and a reminder that maintaining peace requires cooperation among nations and peoples.

21 September is observed as the **United Nations International Day of Peace**. The date was chosen through a process that began in 1981 and was made permanent in 2001.

- **1981:** The UN General Assembly established the International Day of Peace through **Resolution 36/67**. At first, the day was observed on the **third Tuesday of September**, to coincide with the opening of the annual session of the General Assembly.
- **2001:** The UN General Assembly adopted **Resolution 55/282**, deciding that the International Day of Peace would be observed every year on **21 September**.
- **Reason for the date:** The fixed date was intended to provide a specific day when people and nations could focus collectively on **peace and non-violence**. The resolution also called for a **global ceasefire and cessation of hostilities**.
- **First fixed-date observance:** **21 September 2002** was the first International Day of Peace celebrated under the permanent date.

Thus, **21 September does not commemorate a particular historical battle or peace treaty**. Rather, it was selected by the UN as a permanent annual occasion for the world to reflect on peace and encourage the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Peace One Day is a non-profit organization founded by British filmmaker **Jeremy Gilley** in 1999. Its main goal was to establish a specific day when people around the world would commit to **non-violence and ceasefire**.

Peace One Day played an important role in promoting **21 September** as a global day of peace. Gilley campaigned for the United Nations to make the International Day of Peace a fixed date.

In **2001**, the UN General Assembly adopted Resolution 55/282, establishing **21 September** as the permanent International Day of Peace and calling for a **global ceasefire and cessation of hostilities**.

Peace One Day subsequently worked to promote the idea of a worldwide **Peace Day ceasefire**, particularly in areas affected by armed conflict.

Jeremy Gilley began his campaign after asking a simple question: **Could there be one day each year when the entire world stopped fighting?**

His efforts were documented in the film *Peace One Day*, which helped bring international attention to the campaign. He also worked with governments, humanitarian organizations, schools, celebrities, and other groups to promote Peace Day.

Peace One Day and the United Nations have related but distinct roles:

- **The United Nations** officially established **21 September** as the International Day of Peace.
- **Peace One Day** was a major civil-society campaign advocating for a fixed day of peace and subsequently promoting ceasefires and non-violence on that day.

So, **Peace One Day did not create the UN International Day of Peace**, but its campaign was influential in the movement that led to **21 September becoming the permanent date**.

Since the United Nations General Assembly fixed **21 September** as the International Day of Peace in 2001, the UN has marked the day through a combination of **Peace Bell ceremonies, music, youth programmes, art, cultural performances, education, and public-awareness activities**. Resolution 55/282 specifically called for the day to be observed as a day of **global ceasefire and non-violence**.

A useful historical overview of the major cultural and public-facing activities is:

Year	Cultural/public activity
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2001	The General Assembly adopted Resolution 55/282, establishing 21 September as the permanent International Day of Peace.
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2002	The first observance on the fixed date emphasized peace education, public awareness and ceasefire. The UN also began developing the annual 21 September observance as a major public event.
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2003–2009	Annual Peace Bell ceremonies, speeches, educational activities, student participation and cultural programmes became established features of Peace Day at UN Headquarters. The Peace Bell ceremony traditionally includes the Secretary-General ringing the bell and a moment of reflection.
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2010	The Peace Bell was used to launch the International Year of the Rapprochement of Cultures, highlighting cultural understanding as a component of peace.
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2011	The UN marked the 30th anniversary of the International Day of Peace. The Peace Bell continued to serve as the central symbolic ceremony.
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2012	Under the theme “Sustainable Peace for a Sustainable Future,” the UN combined the Peace Bell ceremony with activities involving students, musicians and NGOs.
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2014	The theme “Right of Peoples to Peace” connected Peace Day with human rights and education and encouraged public awareness activities around the world.
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2016	Under “The Sustainable Development Goals: Building Blocks for Peace,” the UN held the Peace Bell ceremony and a global student videoconference. Nobel Peace Prize laureates and UN Messengers of Peace participated.
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2017 The Peace Bell ceremony emphasized preventing conflict and sustaining peace, with participation by UN officials and peace advocates.

2019 The UN held its traditional Peace Bell Ceremony followed by a Student Observance involving more than 700 high-school and university students. UN Messengers of Peace, including musicians, also participated.

2020 Because of COVID-19, the observance moved online. A major cultural element was the “Shaping Peace Together” virtual concert, featuring artists including Yo-Yo Ma, Keb' Mo', Victoria Canal, Melanie and Mary Gauthier.

2021 The 40th anniversary observance included a Youth Observance, international student participation, messages from UN Messengers of Peace, and the Peace Bell ceremony.

2022 More than 500 students participated in the Youth Observance. The programme also featured the Blue Man Group, bringing performing arts into the UN's Peace Day programme.

2023 The UN organized a Peace Bell Ceremony and a Youth Event in which young people presented actions they were taking in their schools and communities to advance the Sustainable Development Goals and peace.

2024 The UN expanded the artistic dimension of Peace Day through street art and murals. Artist Thomas Evans (“Detour”) created a large mural at UN Headquarters, while UN peacekeeping missions in Kosovo, Cyprus, the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of the Congo organized community street-art activities.

2025 The Peace Day programme continued the established Peace Bell Ceremony, with the Secretary-General and President of the General Assembly ringing the bell and observing a minute of silence in the Peace Garden.

Over this period, several activities have become especially associated with **21 September**:

- **Peace Bell Ceremony:** The most enduring UN cultural tradition. The Japanese Peace Bell, donated in 1954, is rung as a symbol of humanity's shared desire for peace.
- **Youth and student programmes:** Young people from different countries participate in discussions, presentations, artistic activities and peace projects.
- **Music and concerts:** Music has been used to communicate the universal message of peace, particularly through UN Messengers of Peace and special concerts such as the 2020 virtual concert.
- **Visual art:** Murals, exhibitions and collaborative art projects have increasingly become part of Peace Day activities, including the major street-art programme in 2024.
- **Education and dialogue:** Student conferences, international discussions and educational programmes connect the cultural celebration of peace with practical peacebuilding.
- **Minute of silence and reflection:** The Peace Bell ceremony normally concludes with a moment of silence, reinforcing the solemn purpose of the day.

Since **2001**, the UN's observance of 21 September has evolved from primarily a **ceremonial and diplomatic occasion** into a broader cultural platform. **Music, art, youth participation, education, storytelling and intercultural dialogue** are now used alongside the traditional

Peace Bell to communicate the idea that peace is not simply the absence of war but a culture that must be actively built.

Importantly, the cultural events complement the original purpose of the day: **24 hours of non-violence and ceasefire and the strengthening of the ideals of peace among all nations and peoples.**

The UN's New York grounds are more commonly described by the UN as the **North Lawn / North Garden**, rather than as a single formally designated "Peace Garden." The grounds contain a collection of sculptures, memorials and peace-related artworks that have been installed over many decades. The UN currently describes its visitor experience as including the "peaceful North Lawn."

When did the UN Peace Garden begin?

The landscape around UN Headquarters dates from the construction of the complex in **1949–1952**. The Headquarters itself was completed in 1952, and gifts of sculpture and landscaping began to be incorporated into the grounds soon afterward.

So, rather than one Peace Garden being created on a particular date, it is more accurate to understand the area as an **evolving outdoor collection of peace-related monuments and works of art**, developed from the early 1950s onward.

Some of the most important works are:



1. Peace Monument — 1954

The **Peace Monument** is one of the oldest and most prominent peace sculptures on the UN grounds.

It was donated by **Yugoslavia in 1954** and created by Croatian sculptor **Antun Augustinčić**. It depicts a woman riding a horse, holding an **olive branch** in one hand and a **globe** in the other. The woman symbolizes humanity leading the world toward peace.

It was unveiled on **2 December 1954** and stands near the northern entrance to the General Assembly Building.



2. Single Form — 1964

Single Form, by British sculptor **Barbara Hepworth**, was unveiled on **11 June 1964**.

It was created as a memorial to **Dag Hammarskjöld**, the second UN Secretary-General, who died in a plane crash in 1961. Hammarskjöld himself had admired Hepworth's work and had expressed the wish that the area in front of the Secretariat should eventually contain an appropriate sculpture.

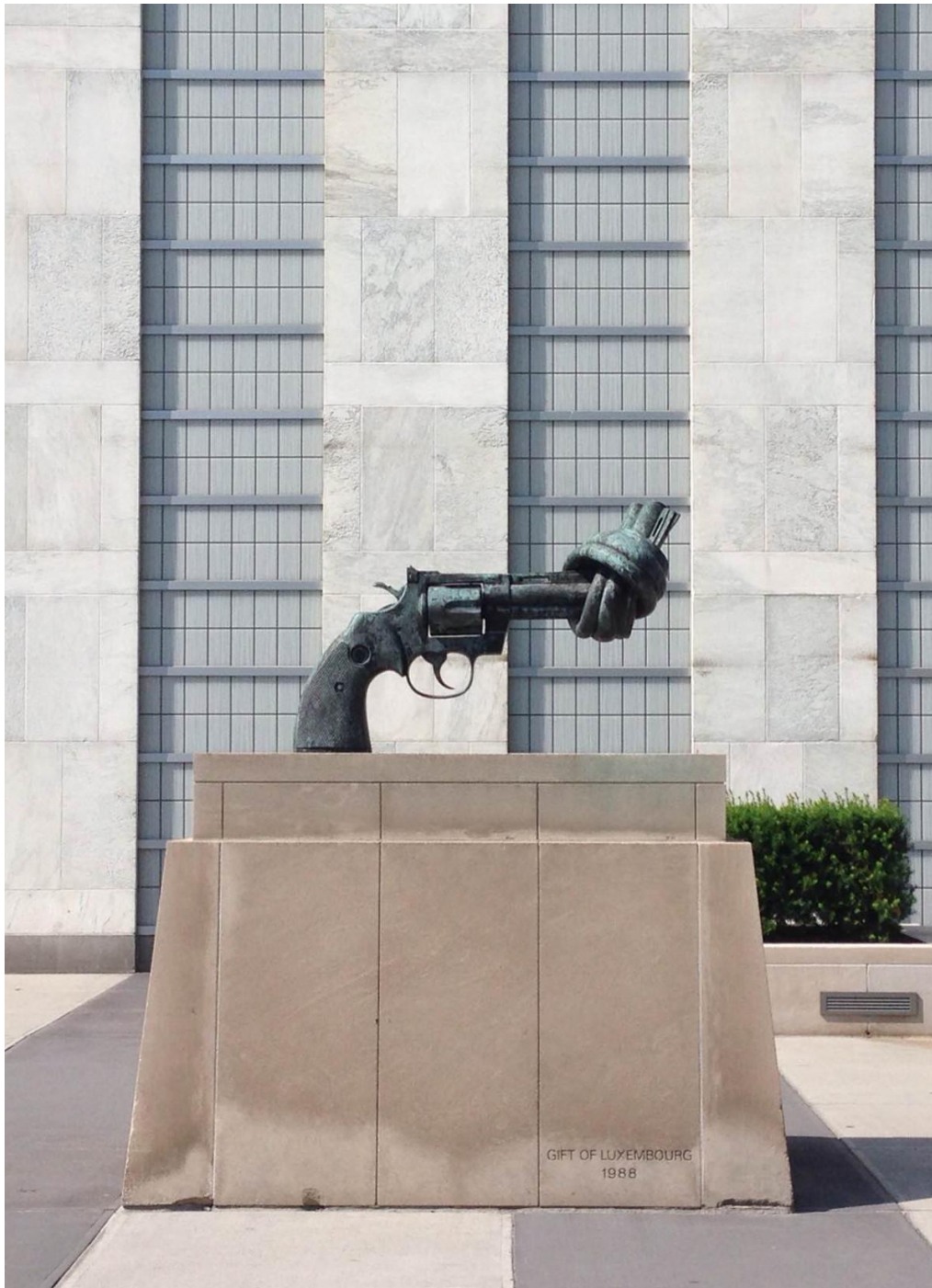
The large bronze sculpture stands in the pool in front of the Secretariat Building.



3. Roots and Ties for Peace — 1983

Brazil donated **Roots and Ties for Peace**, by artist **Yolanda d'Augsburg Ulm**, in 1983.

The stainless-steel sculpture is on the **North Lawn**. Its intertwined forms represent the connections between cultures and countries and the aspiration of the Americas to work together for peace.



4. Non-Violence — 1988

Perhaps the most internationally recognizable sculpture on the UN grounds is **Non-Violence**, also known as the **Knotted Gun**, by Swedish artist **Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd**.

The bronze sculpture depicts a revolver with its barrel tied in a knot. **Luxembourg donated it to the UN in 1988**, and it was installed at UN Headquarters in June 1988.

It has become a powerful symbol of **non-violence, disarmament and the rejection of armed violence**.



5. United Nations Peacekeepers Memorial — 2003

The **United Nations Peacekeepers Memorial** is particularly relevant to a Peace Garden because it commemorates people who **lost their lives in the pursuit of peace**.

It was dedicated on **United Nations Day, 24 October 2003**, and is located in the **North Lawn garden**. It was funded from the money associated with the **1988 Nobel Peace Prize awarded to UN peacekeeping forces**.

At its centre is a crystal-glass wall bearing the words:

“Remember here those who gave their lives for peace”

The memorial incorporates water, marble, granite and onyx, creating a place for quiet reflection.



6. Kwibuka Flame of Hope — 2024

A much more recent addition is the **Kwibuka Flame of Hope**, donated by Rwanda.

It was installed in the **north garden area on 11 September 2024**. It commemorates the victims of the **1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda** and symbolizes the resilience of survivors and the responsibility to oppose hate, misinformation and genocide.

Not everything associated with the UN's peace message is located outdoors.

The most important example is **War and Peace**, the monumental pair of murals by Brazilian artist **Candido Portinari**. They were installed in the General Assembly Building in 1957. The idea was deliberately symbolic: delegates entering the Assembly would encounter **War**, reminding them of what they were trying to prevent, and leaving the Assembly they would see **Peace**, representing the objective of their work.



The UN also has the **Meditation Room**, which opened in 1952 and was designed as a place for silence and reflection within an organization devoted to peace.

A useful chronology

Year	Work / memorial	Main message
1952	UN Headquarters and landscaped grounds completed	A permanent home for international cooperation
1954	Peace Monument	World peace
1964	Single Form	Peace, unity and remembrance of Hammarskjöld
1983	Roots and Ties for Peace	Cultural connections and harmony
1988	Non-Violence / Knotted Gun	Non-violence and disarmament
2003	UN Peacekeepers Memorial	Remembering those who died serving peace
2024	Kwibuka Flame of Hope	Remembrance, resilience and prevention of genocide

Taken together, these works make the UN grounds something more than a landscaped public space. They form an **outdoor history of the international peace ideal**:

Peace → remembrance → non-violence → cultural cooperation → peacekeeping → prevention of genocide.

That makes the North Lawn/North Garden particularly appropriate for **21 September, the International Day of Peace**, when the UN's Peace Bell ceremony and other commemorations connect the physical symbols around Headquarters with the wider global peace movement.



Let Us Beat Swords Into Ploughshares is a bronze sculpture by artist Evgeniy Vuchetich (1908 – 1974).



The UN Meditation Room: “A Room of Quiet”

The **Meditation Room at United Nations Headquarters in New York** is one of the most distinctive spaces at the UN. It was conceived not as a chapel belonging to a particular religion, but as a **universal place for silence, reflection and inner stillness**. It is located on the west side of the public lobby of the General Assembly Building.

1. When was it created?

The room **opened in October 1952**, when the new UN Headquarters was completed. It was subsequently **remodeled/enlarged and reopened in 1957**.

The original plans for the Headquarters already included a small room for silence, but **Dag Hammarskjöld**, the UN's second Secretary-General, believed that the organization needed a more dignified and meaningful space. He personally took a major role in its conception and design.

Hammarskjöld became Secretary-General in **1953**, so there is an interesting chronology here: the room opened in 1952, before he became Secretary-General, but he was already deeply involved in its creation and subsequently supervised its development and renovation. The UN itself describes the room as having been envisioned and personally supervised by Hammarskjöld.

2. Why did Hammarskjöld want a Meditation Room?

For Hammarskjöld, peace was not merely a political or diplomatic achievement. He believed that the pursuit of peace also required **inner reflection, silence and spiritual awareness**.

His fundamental idea was that an institution devoted to peace should contain a physical space where people could temporarily step away from debate, negotiations and political conflict.

He famously described the concept as:

“This house, dedicated to work and debate in the service of peace, should have one room dedicated to silence...”

The room was therefore intended to provide both **“silence in the outward sense” and “stillness in the inner sense.”**

This is particularly significant at the UN because diplomats, politicians, staff and visitors from very different religious and cultural traditions meet there.

3. A space for all faiths — and no particular faith

Hammarskjöld deliberately avoided making the room a Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist or otherwise specifically religious space.

He explained that people of many faiths would use it, so **traditional religious symbols should not dominate the room**. Instead, the design uses simple universal elements—**light, stone, space and silence**—that people can interpret according to their own beliefs.

This makes the room an early and powerful example of **interfaith and intercultural design** at the United Nations.

4. The six-ton iron-ore block

The most striking object in the room is a massive **approximately six-ton block of Swedish iron ore** positioned at the centre.

It was donated by **Sweden in 1952** and is illuminated from above by a single shaft of light.

The stone is deliberately simple. Hammarskjöld saw it as a symbol of **permanence and endurance in a changing world**.

But it also carries a deeper meaning: iron can be transformed into **weapons of war** or into **tools such as ploughshares**. Thus, the material itself evokes humanity's choice between destruction and construction—between **war and peace**.

The light falling on the stone represents the meeting of **sky and earth**, and, symbolically, the relationship between spiritual light and material existence.

5. The Bo Beskow mural

At the narrow end of the room is an **abstract mural by Swedish artist Bo Beskow**, a close friend of Hammarskjöld.

The mural uses **blue, white, grey and yellow geometric forms**, rather than recognizable religious imagery. Its abstract composition was deliberately chosen to make the room accessible to people of different faiths and traditions.

The UN explains that the mural evokes the idea of **light from the skies giving life to the earth**. A small black point or half-circle provides a visual point of rest for the eye.

So, the room has a carefully constructed visual language:

Light → stone → earth → silence → reflection → peace.

6. The twelve benches

The room originally contained **12 simple wooden benches**, designed by Swedish furniture designer **Carl Malmsten**.

The simplicity was intentional. Hammarskjöld wanted the room to avoid the appearance of a conventional church or ceremonial hall. The benches allow visitors to sit quietly without directing them toward a particular religious practice.

In **2021**, the Permanent Mission of Sweden donated replacement benches made by the same company, using the original design, materials and techniques.

7. The meaning of silence

Perhaps the most important feature of the room is actually **what is not there**.

There are no speeches, flags, national symbols or political messages inside. The space is intentionally restrained.

Hammarskjöld wanted to recover a kind of stillness that he felt had been lost in modern cities and even in the UN's own conference rooms. His vision was that visitors should be able to withdraw from the noise of the outside world and enter a space where they could think, pray or simply remain silent.

This gives the Meditation Room an unusual place within the UN: **it is not a room for negotiating peace; it is a room for contemplating peace.**

8. Connection with Dag Hammarskjöld

The room is inseparable from Hammarskjöld's understanding of the UN.

He was deeply interested in literature, music, art and spirituality as well as diplomacy. His approach suggested that international peace required not only political institutions but also **reflection, moral responsibility and respect for the human person.**

He gave the Meditation Room extraordinary personal attention. Accounts from people who worked with him describe him visiting the room late at night while it was being completed, personally checking details such as the colour and lighting.

Hammarhjöld died in **1961** while on a UN peace mission in Congo. The Meditation Room consequently became associated even more strongly with his legacy of international peace and service.

9. The room today

The Meditation Room continues to function as a place of quiet reflection at UN Headquarters. The UN has described it as a room dedicated to **world peace for people of all faiths and religions**.

It has also been used for gatherings connected with peace and remembrance. The UN has held regular **silent meditation gatherings**, bringing together diplomats, UN staff, NGOs and visitors.

10. Why it is important for 21 September

The Meditation Room has a particularly strong connection with the **International Day of Peace on 21 September**.

The Peace Bell outside and the Meditation Room inside represent two complementary approaches to peace:

- **The Peace Bell:** a public, collective call for peace.
- **The Meditation Room:** private silence and inner reflection.
- **The Peace Garden/UN grounds:** public art and memorials expressing peace, remembrance and non-violence.
- **The General Assembly:** political dialogue and collective decision-making.

Together, they express a central idea of the UN: **peace must be pursued both externally through diplomacy and internally through reflection, understanding and respect for human dignity**.

The Meditation Room can therefore be understood as **the spiritual heart of the UN Headquarters**—not because it belongs to any religion, but precisely because it belongs to **everyone**.

Its six-ton stone, single beam of light, abstract mural, simple benches and deliberate silence transform a very small room into a universal symbol: **in an institution created to resolve conflicts through words, there must also be a place where people stop speaking and listen inwardly**.

The United Nations Headquarters in New York has an unusually rich collection of **paintings, murals, sculptures and memorials connected with peace, human dignity, reconciliation and international cooperation**. The UN Gifts collection has received artworks from Member States, foundations and individuals since **1950**. Here are the most important works if your focus is specifically **visual art and the idea of peace**.



1. *War and Peace* — Candido Portinari, Brazil, 1957

This is arguably the **most important peace artwork at the UN**.

Brazilian artist **Candido Portinari** created two enormous murals:

- **War** — showing suffering, destruction and the victims of conflict.
- **Peace** — showing children, families, music, dance and human harmony.

Each mural is approximately **47 feet high and 35 feet wide**. They were installed in the Delegates' Lobby outside the General Assembly Hall in 1957.

The placement is deliberate. Diplomats entering the General Assembly encounter **War**; when they leave, they encounter **Peace**. The artwork therefore creates a visual narrative:

War → deliberation → Peace

Portinari deliberately did **not** depict weapons in *War*. Instead, he depicted human suffering. In *Peace*, he used warmer colours and images of children and celebration to express what humanity hopes to achieve.

The murals underwent major conservation in Brazil and were **reinstalled at the UN in 2015**.



2. Peace Monument — Antun Augustinčić, 1954

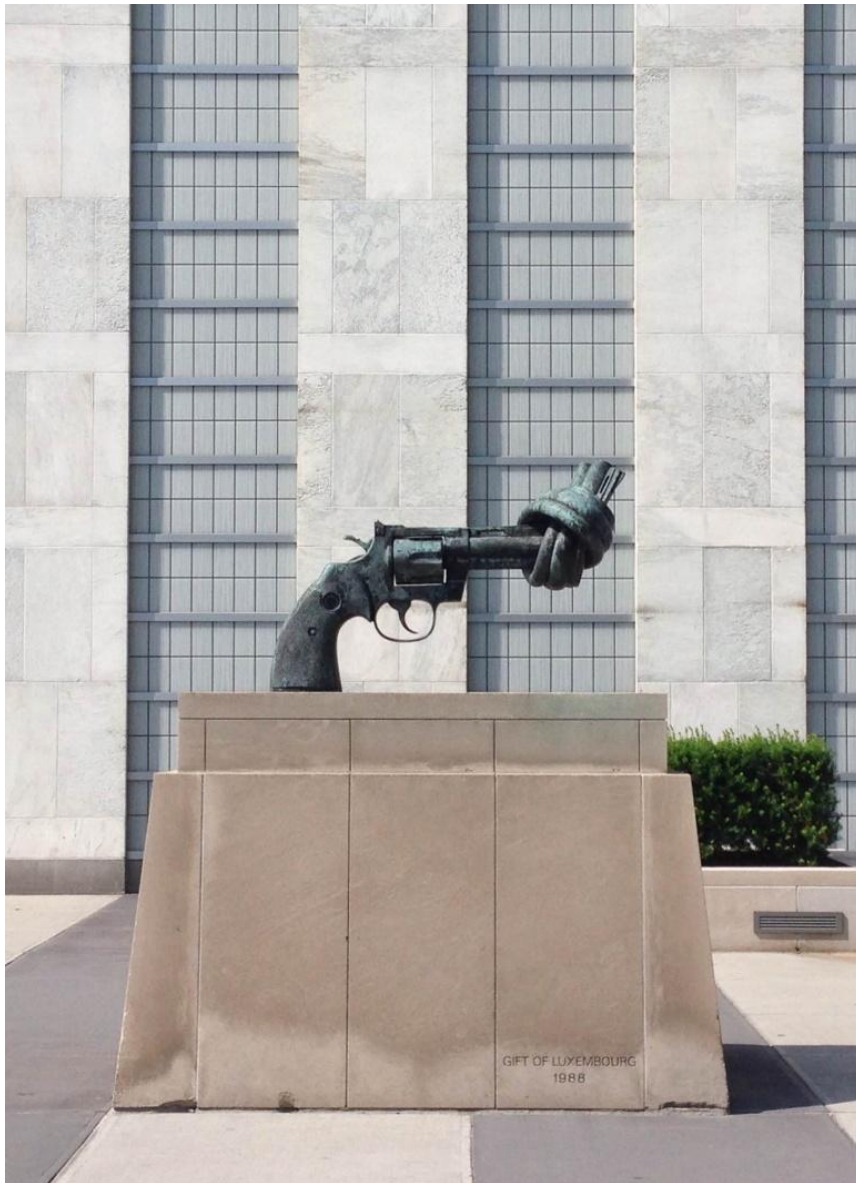
Outside the General Assembly Building stands the monumental **Peace Monument**, created by Croatian/Yugoslav sculptor **Antun Augustinčić**.

It depicts:

- a **woman**
- riding a **horse**
- holding an **olive branch**
- and carrying a **globe**.

The woman symbolically leads the nations of the world toward peace. The work was unveiled on **2 December 1954** and was donated by Yugoslavia.

The symbolism is especially interesting: the horse is traditionally associated with warfare, yet here it is controlled by a figure representing peace. Augustinčić described the concept in terms of the need to **fight for peace**.



3. *Non-Violence / Knotted Gun* — Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd, 1980/1988

This is probably the **most instantly recognizable peace sculpture at the UN.**

Swedish artist **Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd** created the bronze sculpture after the murder of his friend **John Lennon**. It depicts a .45-calibre revolver whose barrel has been tied into a knot, making it impossible to fire.

The sculpture was donated to the UN by **Luxembourg** and installed at Headquarters in **1988**.

Its message is extraordinarily direct:

A weapon has been transformed into a symbol of non-violence.

It has subsequently become an international symbol of peace and disarmament, with replicas around the world.



4. *Mankind's Struggle for Lasting Peace* — José Vela Zanetti

Another major peace-related artwork is the mural by Spanish artist **José Vela Zanetti**, titled **Mankind's Struggle for Lasting Peace**.

The work is important because it presents peace not as something automatically achieved, but as a **struggle undertaken collectively by humanity**.

The UN itself includes the Zanetti mural among the principal works highlighted in its educational **Art of the UN** programme.

The mural is particularly valuable when considered alongside Portinari's *War and Peace*: Portinari presents the **consequences of war and the ideal of peace**, while Zanetti emphasizes **humanity's continuing effort to achieve lasting peace**.





5. *Single Form* — Barbara Hepworth, 1964

British sculptor **Barbara Hepworth's *Single Form*** is one of the most significant sculptures at the UN.

It was created as a memorial to **Dag Hammarskjöld**, the UN Secretary-General who died in 1961.

Hepworth's abstract sculpture stands in the reflecting pool in front of the Secretariat Building. It is not literally titled "Peace," but it has a profound connection to the UN's peace mission because Hammarskjöld devoted his life to international peacekeeping and diplomacy.

It represents an important second dimension of UN peace art: **peace through remembrance and service.**



6. *Roots and Ties for Peace* — Yolanda d'Augsburg Ulm, 1983

This stainless-steel sculpture stands on the **North Lawn**.

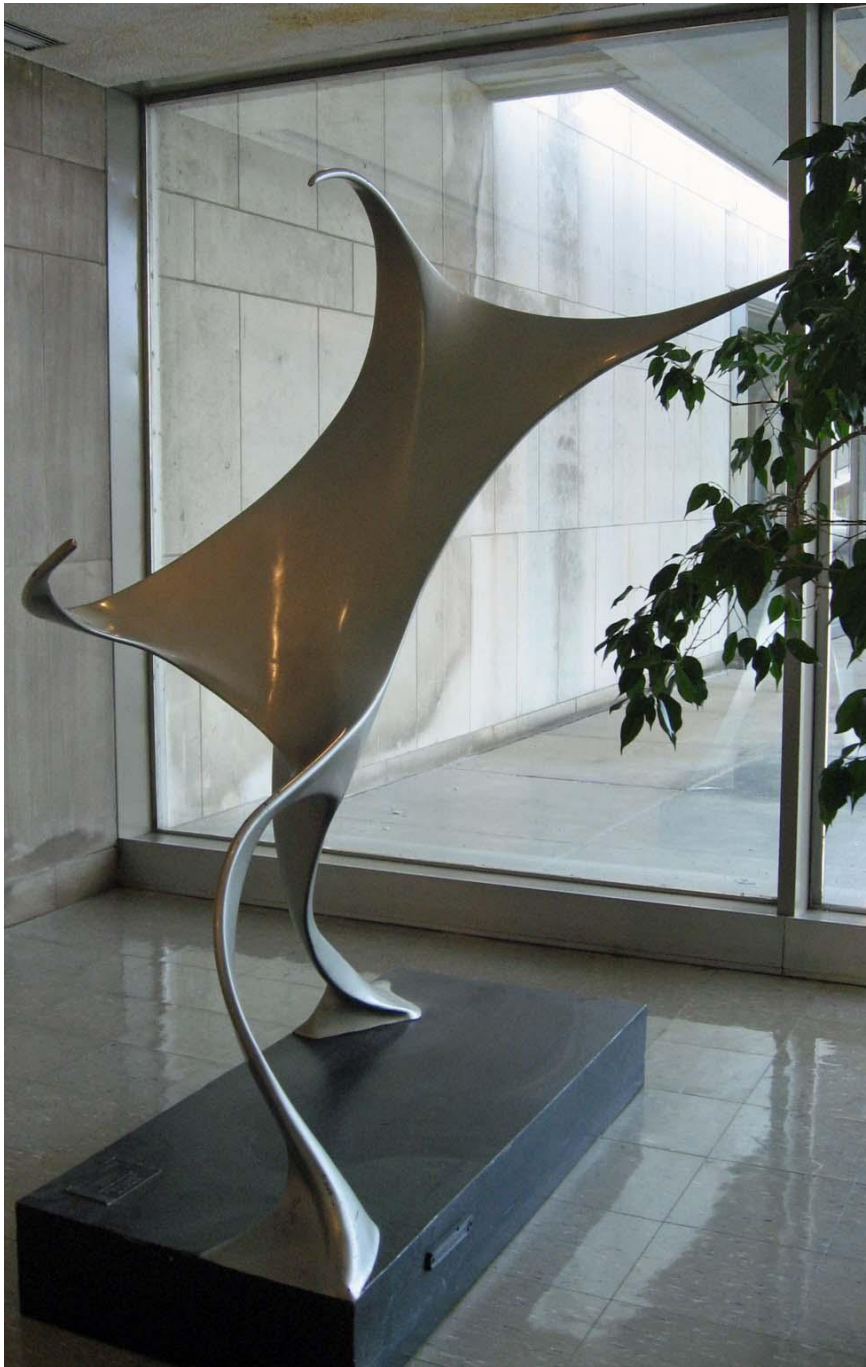
Brazilian artist **Yolanda d'Augsburg Ulm** designed the work to represent the cultural roots and connections that unite people. The sculpture specifically symbolizes the **Americas joining forces to work for peace**.

The title itself is important:

Roots suggest identity and cultural heritage.

Ties suggest connection between peoples.

Peace becomes the result of those relationships.



7. *Embrace of Peace* — Ramiro Matas Gonzales, 1985

This sculpture from the **Dominican Republic** depicts a human figure with **open arms**.

It was presented to the UN for its **40th anniversary in 1985**. The gesture of open arms creates a simple visual metaphor for **welcome, reconciliation, friendship and peace**.

It is particularly interesting when compared with *Non-Violence*: one rejects violence through the image of a disabled weapon, while the other expresses peace through the **human gesture of embracing**.



8. *Reaching for the Skies* — Amin Guljee, 2019

Pakistan's **Reaching for the Skies** is a much more recent addition.

The bronze sculpture consists of a series of overlapping **human hands**. The artist describes the hands as representing humanity's shared struggle, hope and desire to achieve something collectively.

Its connection with peace is therefore based on **unity and collective action** rather than an explicit peace symbol.

It represents an evolution in UN peace art:

peace is something humanity builds together.



9. *Kusikawsay* — Colombia, 2019

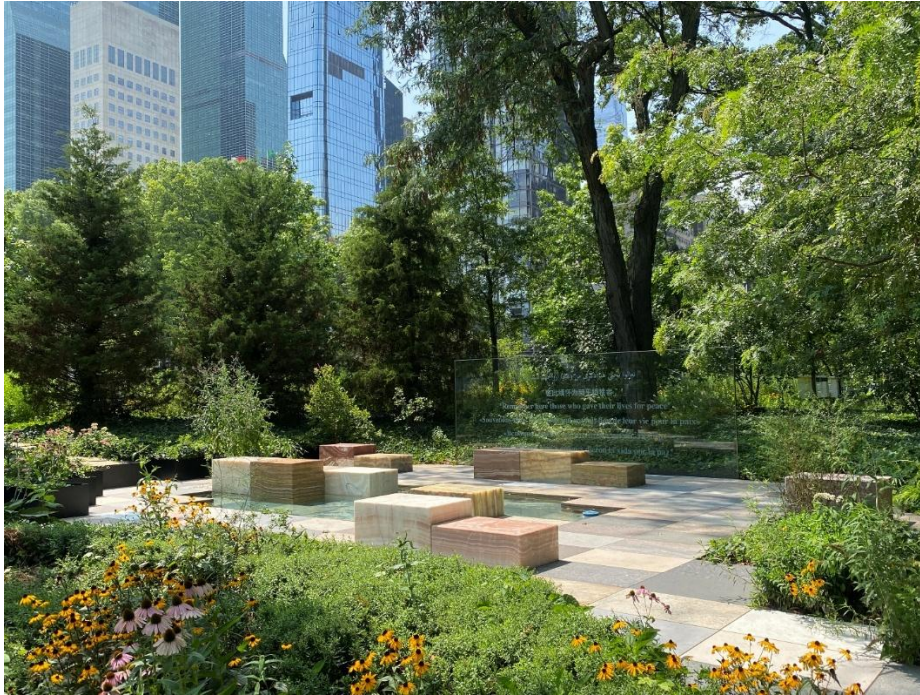
This is one of the most historically interesting recent peace monuments.

Kusikawsay, by Colombian artist **Mario Opazo**, was created from **steel armaments**. It represents Colombia's transition from more than five decades of internal armed conflict toward peace.

The sculpture was donated to the UN in **2019** following the Colombian peace process between the Colombian Government and FARC.

There are three monuments associated with the peace agreement: one in **Cuba**, where negotiations took place; one in **Colombia**; and one at the **United Nations Headquarters**.

This gives the sculpture a particularly powerful meaning: **weapons of conflict → material for a monument to peace**.



10. UN Peacekeepers Memorial — 2003

Although technically a memorial rather than simply a work of art, this is essential to understanding the visual culture of peace at the UN.

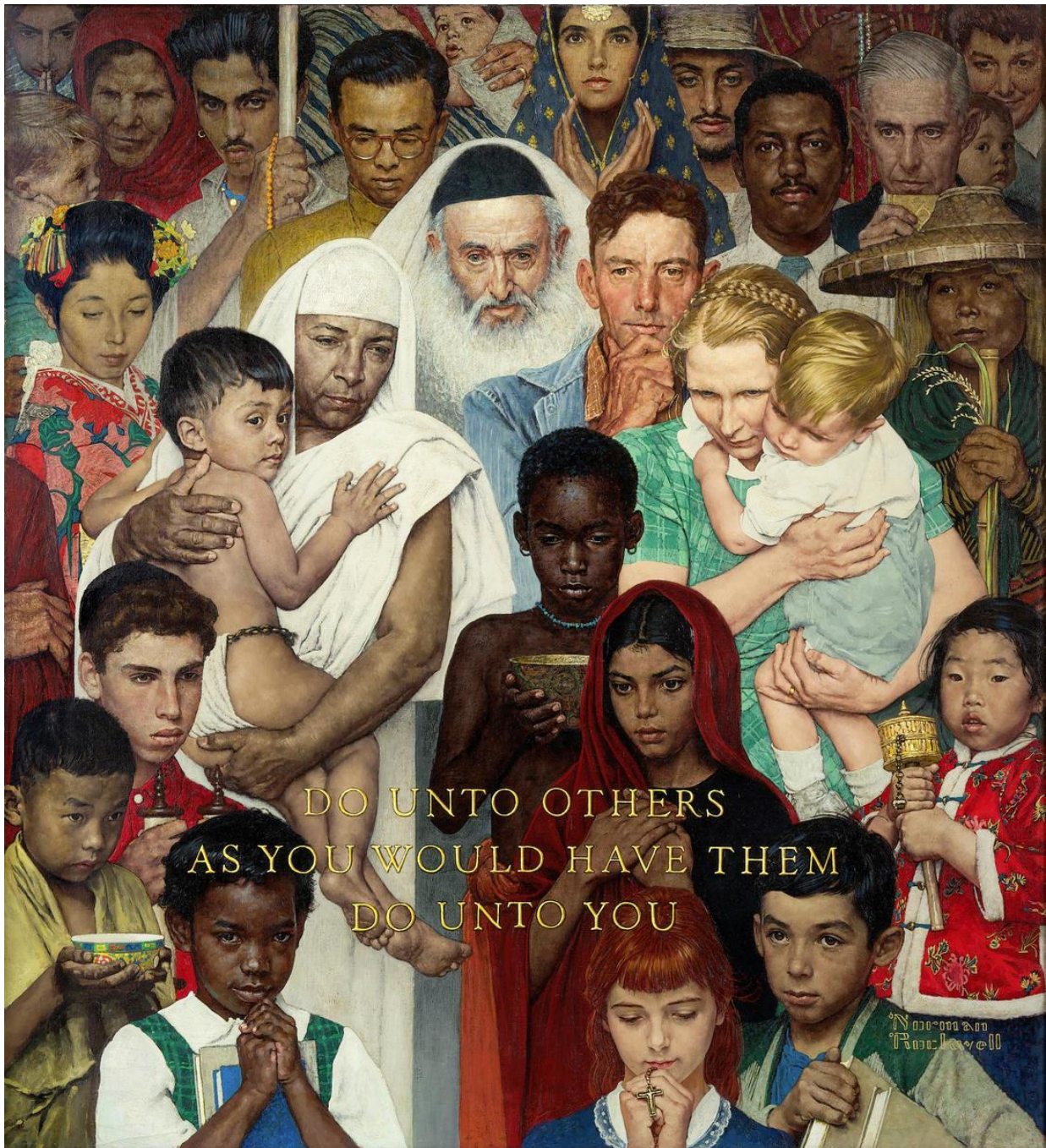
The memorial on the North Lawn commemorates UN personnel who **gave their lives in the pursuit of peace**.

Its inscription reads:

“Remember here those who gave their lives for peace”

It creates a connection between **peace as an ideal** and **peacekeeping as a human sacrifice**.





11. *The Golden Rule* — Norman Rockwell

The UN also has Norman Rockwell's famous **The Golden Rule**, presented as a mosaic.

It is based on the principle found in many religious and philosophical traditions:

treat others as you would want to be treated.

The artwork shows people of different races, religions and nationalities and therefore fits strongly into the UN's broader visual language of **human equality, tolerance and mutual respect**. The UN highlights it as one of the key works in its Art of the UN programme.



12. The Meditation Room and its visual art

The **Meditation Room**, opened in 1952 and later redesigned, is itself an important piece of peace-oriented art and architecture.

At its centre is the large Swedish **iron-ore block**, illuminated from above. The room was designed around **silence, light, reflection and peace**, rather than around a particular religious tradition.

The visual concept is important because it represents another form of peace:

inner peace → reflection → understanding → peace among people.

The UN describes it as a room dedicated to silence within an organization dedicated to the service of peace.

The UN's visual language of peace

Taken together, these artworks reveal several recurring symbols:

Symbol	Examples	Meaning
 Peace	Portinari, Peace Monument	The desired condition of humanity
 Olive branch	Peace Monument	Reconciliation and peace
 Disabled weapon	<i>Non-Violence</i>	Rejection of violence
 Human connection	<i>Roots and Ties for Peace</i>	Cooperation between peoples
 Open arms	<i>Embrace of Peace</i>	Reconciliation and welcome
 Human unity	<i>Reaching for the Skies</i>	Collective responsibility
   Weapons transformed	<i>Kusikawsay</i>	Turning conflict into peace
 Children and celebration	Portinari's <i>Peace</i>	What peace makes possible
 Light and silence	Meditation Room	Inner reflection
 Remembrance	Peacekeepers Memorial, <i>Single Form</i>	The human cost of pursuing peace

The most important works for a 21 September programme

If you are researching these works specifically for an **International Day of Peace / 21 September cultural programme**, I would prioritize these six:

1. **Portinari — *War and Peace***: peace as the alternative to the devastation of war.
2. **Augustinčić — *Peace Monument***: peace as a universal political aspiration.
3. **Reuterswärd — *Non-Violence***: peace through rejecting weapons and violence.
4. **Hepworth — *Single Form***: remembrance and the service of peace.
5. **Meditation Room**: inner peace, silence and reflection.
6. **Kusikawsay**: transforming the material of conflict into a symbol of peace.

Together they tell a remarkably coherent story: **the UN remembers war, rejects violence, honours those who serve peace, encourages dialogue between peoples, and imagines a world in which the instruments of conflict can be transformed into instruments of peace.**

The UN has many **International Days** that are comparable to the **International Day of Peace (21 September)**, particularly those that promote human rights, non-violence, dialogue, cultural understanding, solidarity, and peaceful societies.

If your interest is specifically in the **cultural and symbolic character** of 21 September, some are much closer than others.

The closest UN International Days to Peace Day:

1. International Day of Non-Violence — 2 October

This is probably the **closest thematic counterpart** to the International Day of Peace.

Established by the UN in **2007**, 2 October is the birthday of **Mahatma Gandhi**. The day promotes a culture of peace, tolerance and non-violence.

It has a particularly strong connection with **art, education, public events and Gandhi's philosophy of non-violent resistance**.

Connection to Peace Day:

- Peace
- Non-violence
- Conflict resolution
- Human dignity
- Education
- Public cultural events

Key distinction: 21 September is a global UN call for peace and ceasefire; 2 October focuses specifically on **non-violence as a method and philosophy for achieving peace**.

2. International Day of Living Together in Peace — 16 May

This is perhaps the **closest conceptual companion** to Peace Day.

The UN proclaimed **16 May** as the International Day of Living Together in Peace in **2017**.

It promotes:

- Reconciliation
- Tolerance
- Solidarity
- Understanding
- Acceptance of differences
- Peaceful coexistence

The day is particularly relevant to **intercultural and interreligious dialogue**.

If 21 September asks:

How do we achieve peace?

16 May asks:

How do different peoples actually live together peacefully?

3. International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace — 24 April

Established in **2018**, this day is especially relevant to the **UN's institutional role in peace**.

It celebrates **multilateralism and diplomacy** as tools for resolving international conflicts.

It is therefore more political and diplomatic than cultural.

The distinction is useful:

21 September → Peace as a global ideal

24 April → Diplomacy and multilateralism as mechanisms for achieving peace

4. International Day of Tolerance — 16 November

Established by the UN in **1996**, this day promotes tolerance and respect for cultural and human diversity.

It has a strong connection to the cultural dimension of peace because intolerance, discrimination and prejudice can contribute to conflict.

It is especially relevant if you are interested in:

- Art
- Culture
- Intercultural dialogue
- Religious diversity
- Education
- Human rights

5. World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development — 21 May

This is another very strong cultural counterpart.

The day promotes the idea that **cultural diversity can be a source of dialogue, creativity and peaceful coexistence rather than conflict**.

For a programme combining **art + culture + peace**, this may actually be one of the most relevant UN observances.

It provides a conceptual bridge:

Cultural diversity → dialogue → understanding → peaceful coexistence

6. International Day of Human Fraternity — 4 February

Established by the UN General Assembly in **2020**, this day promotes **interreligious and intercultural dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding**.

It grew out of the **Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together**, signed in Abu Dhabi in 2019 by **Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed Al-Tayeb**.

This makes it particularly interesting for programmes dealing with **religion, spirituality, culture and peace**.

7. International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism — 21 August

This day has a different emotional character but is strongly connected with peace.

It focuses on **remembering victims and survivors of terrorism**, recognizing their rights and supporting their recovery.

Its visual and cultural possibilities include:

- Memorials
- Testimony
- Photography
- Documentary film
- Exhibitions
- Music
- Storytelling

It represents **peace through remembrance**.

8. International Day of Peacekeepers — 29 May

This is particularly relevant to the UN's own history.

The **International Day of UN Peacekeepers** honours the military, police and civilian personnel who serve in UN peace operations.

It is closely connected with the **UN Peacekeepers Memorial** at Headquarters in New York.

The relationship with 21 September is therefore:

21 September → the ideal of peace

29 May → the people who work in the field to maintain peace

A particularly interesting comparison

If you are researching **UN cultural events, art, sculpture, music and ceremonies**, I would organize the related UN days into four groups:

Peace itself

- **21 September — International Day of Peace**

Non-violence and reconciliation

- **2 October — International Day of Non-Violence**
- **16 May — International Day of Living Together in Peace**

Culture and dialogue

- **21 May — World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development**
- **16 November — International Day for Tolerance**
- **4 February — International Day of Human Fraternity**

UN peace mechanisms and remembrance

- **24 April — International Day of Multilateralism and Diplomacy for Peace**
- **29 May — International Day of UN Peacekeepers**
- **21 August — International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the Victims of Terrorism**

Which is most comparable to 21 September?

If your purpose is to identify **another UN observance that could have a similar cultural programme to Peace Day**, my ranking would be:

1. **16 May — International Day of Living Together in Peace**
2. **2 October — International Day of Non-Violence**
3. **21 May — World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development**
4. **16 November — International Day for Tolerance**
5. **29 May — International Day of UN Peacekeepers**

The **16 May observance** is especially interesting because it provides a natural thematic continuation of Peace Day: **peace is not only the absence of war; it is the ability of people with different identities, cultures and beliefs to live together.**

And there is a potentially powerful cultural framework across the three dates:

21 May → Cultural Diversity

16 May → Living Together in Peace

21 September → International Peace

2 October → Non-Violence

Together, these could form a coherent **UN cultural calendar of peace**, with visual art, music, literature, youth participation, dialogue and public ceremonies as connecting elements.

Disarmament is one of the closest UN themes to the International Day of Peace, and it has its own UN observances. In fact, if you are looking at the **art, sculpture and symbolism of peace at UN Headquarters**, disarmament is particularly important.

UN observances related to disarmament:

1. International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons — 26 September

This is probably the **most important UN International Day directly connected with disarmament**. The UN General Assembly established **26 September** as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons in **2013**.

The day calls attention to:

- Nuclear disarmament
- The humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons
- Reducing nuclear risks
- Preventing nuclear war
- Achieving a world free of nuclear weapons

It is particularly significant because the UN was created in the aftermath of the Second World War and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

2. International Day of Peace — 21 September

The connection between **21 September and 26 September** is very strong.

There is a five-day sequence:

21 September — Peace

22–25 September — international dialogue and diplomacy

26 September — nuclear disarmament

The Peace Day message is broader: **peace and non-violence**.

The 26 September message is more specific: **eliminating one of the most destructive categories of weapons**.

3. UN Disarmament Week — 24–30 October

This is even broader than a single International Day.

The UN observes **Disarmament Week from 24 to 30 October**, beginning on **United Nations Day (24 October)**.

It promotes awareness of:

- Nuclear weapons
- Conventional weapons
- Arms control
- Disarmament
- International security
- Conflict prevention

It therefore provides a broader annual framework for UN disarmament activities.

4. International Day against Nuclear Tests — 29 August

Another highly relevant observance is the **International Day against Nuclear Tests**, held every year on **29 August**.

It was established by the General Assembly in **2009**.

The day raises awareness of the harmful effects of **nuclear weapons testing** on people, communities and the environment, and supports efforts toward a world without nuclear tests.

This is especially connected to **visual art and remembrance**, because nuclear testing has left a profound cultural and historical legacy in places such as Kazakhstan, the Pacific, the United States, Australia and elsewhere.

5. International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness — 5 March

The UN also observes **5 March** as the **International Day for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation Awareness**.

Established in **2022**, it aims to increase public understanding of:

- Disarmament
- Non-proliferation
- International security
- The dangers posed by weapons of mass destruction

This is particularly useful if you are looking at **education and youth programmes** around disarmament.

Disarmament and the UN sculptures

There is an especially strong connection between disarmament and the **visual art at UN Headquarters**.

***Non-Violence* — the Knotted Gun**

The clearest example is Carl Fredrik Reuterswärd's **1988 sculpture *Non-Violence***.

The image is extraordinarily simple:

Gun → knot → cannot fire

It has become one of the world's most recognizable symbols of **non-violence and disarmament**.

The sculpture is therefore almost a visual bridge between:

International Day of Peace (21 September)
and
Disarmament / nuclear disarmament observances.

Kusikawsay

The Colombian sculpture **Kusikawsay** provides another powerful connection.

It was created from **weapons from Colombia's armed conflict** and transformed into a monument celebrating the country's transition toward peace.

Its symbolism is:

weapons → art → memory → peace

This is particularly compelling because it demonstrates the idea of **disarmament through transformation** rather than merely displaying a symbol against weapons.

A broader UN "Peace–Disarmament" calendar

If your project is looking at **UN cultural diplomacy, art and peace**, I would see the following dates as one interconnected sequence:

Date	UN observance	Central idea
21 May	Cultural Diversity	Diversity → dialogue
16 May	Living Together in Peace	Coexistence
21 September	International Day of Peace	Peace & non-violence
26 September	Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons	Nuclear disarmament
2 October	Non-Violence	Non-violent action
24–30 October	Disarmament Week	Disarmament & international security
16 November	Tolerance	Understanding & respect

There is therefore a very interesting conceptual progression:

Diversity → Dialogue → Coexistence → Peace → Disarmament → Non-Violence → Tolerance

That provides a strong framework for a **UN Peace and Disarmament cultural programme**, particularly using the UN's visual heritage: *Non-Violence/Knotted Gun*, *The Golden Rule* and the *Meditation Room*.