Commit to unity regardless of ethnicity, faith, gender: Ban Ki-moon

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United Nations: Underscoring yogaâ€™s message of promoting harmony, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon on Tuesday asked citizens across nations to commit to unity regardless of ethnicity, faith, gender and sexual orientation.

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon

â€œOn this International Day of Yoga, I urge everyone to embrace healthier choices and lifestyles and to commit to unity with our fellow human beings, regardless of ethnicity, faith, age, gender identity or sexual orientation. Let us celebrate this Day â€" and every day â€" as members of one human family sharing one common, precious home,â€• Mr. Ban said in his message for 2nd International Day of Yoga which is being commemorated across the world on Tuesday.

Mr. Ban called for equality among humans irrespective of their nationalities and sexual orientation assumes significance in the wake of the tragic shooting last week in Orlando in which 49 people were killed and over 50 injured when 29-year old Omar Mateen opened fire in a popular gay nightclub.

The U.N. Chiefâ€™s message for yoga day was read out by veteran Indian diplomat and currently his Special Advisor on Myanmar Vijay Nambiar during a special panel discussion organised here by Indiaâ€™s Permanent Mission to the U.N. on the eve of yoga day.

Mr. Ban said that the ancient physical, mental and spiritual practice of Yoga originated in India and is now practised in various forms around the world.

â€œYoga balances body and soul, physical health and mental well-being. It promotes harmony among people, and between ourselves and the natural world,â€• he said, adding that the United Nations General Assembly had proclaimed June 21 as the International Day of Yoga in recognition of its â€œuniversal appealâ€•.

Â Â Â He noted the second observance of the International Day of Yoga highlights the important role healthy living plays in the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals, adopted last year by all 193 United Nations member states.

Mr. Ban highlighted that as an exercise, yoga has multiple benefits and can help cultivate healthier lifestyles in current times when physical inactivity is linked with a number of non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

â€œPractising yoga can also help raise awareness of our role as consumers of the planetâ€™s resources and as individuals with a duty to respect and live in peace with our neighbours. All these elements are essential to building a sustainable future of dignity and opportunity for all,â€• he said.

Meanwhile, renowned spiritual leader and Isha Foundation founder Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev said that yoga is Indiaâ€™s gift to the world.

â€œWe must understand that yoga is not an Indian (thing).

If you want to call yoga Indian, then you must call gravity European,â€• the Sadhguru said at a panel discussion organised here on Monday by Indiaâ€™s Permanent Mission to the U.N..

The Sadhguru said even though the idea of commemorating an international yoga day was mooted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, it was â€œalmost like the world was waiting for itâ€• when 177 nations supported the U.N. resolution proclaiming June 21 as International Day of Yoga.

â€œYes, yoga originated from India and as Indians we are proud of it but it does not belong to India,â€• he said, during the panel discussion â€˜Conversation with Yoga Mastersâ€™ that also featured Tao Porchon-Lynch, 97-year-old Yoga Master and activist.

â€œThe very fact that the U.N. has declared it as international yoga day means India has gifted it (Yoga) to the world. It does not belong to India anymore,â€• the Sadhguru said to an audience that included senior U.N. officials, ambassadors and other dignitaries from various countries.

Underlining that yoga is becoming a world-wide phenomenon, he said the science of yoga is not just about health and fitness but it is the â€œultimate solution for every aspect of human existence.â€•

He predicted that over the next 30-50 years, there will be a big movement towards scientific process for inner well-being.

In a conversation with well-known author and activist Max Kennedy, son of American politician Robert F Kennedy, the Sadhguru said his focus over the years has been to remove all the â€œfrills of cultureâ€• that yoga has acquired through the millennia.

Diplomats from Nepal, Bangladesh, Liechtenstein and World Health Organisation also spoke about the importance of yoga and shared personal experiences of how the ancient practice has enriched their lives.

President of General Assembly Morgens Lykketoft is the Chief Guest at the event, which will also be attended by Under Secretary General for Communications and Public Information Cristina Gallach.

The celebration will be led by the Sadhguru and include simple Yoga practice and a musical incantation on Yoga. Special Yogic meals will be served.

- PTI