

## **Iraqi Youth participate in the celebration of the International Day of Peace in New-York**

The student observance of the International Day of Peace has become an important tradition for the United Nations Department of Public Information. For this year's twelfth celebration, which took place on 18 September (21 September being a UN Holiday), the theme was "Disarm Now for a Better World", in line with the United Nations Secretary-General's "We Must Disarm" campaign.

Students from countries where the United Nations has established peacekeeping missions were invited to interact, via videoconference, with each others and with more than 700 students gathered at the UN Headquarters, with Messengers of Peace and the UN Secretary-General, to discuss disarmament and non-proliferation issues and how it affects their lives.

In Iraq, where 50% of the population are said to be under the age of 15, and where millions, more particularly Youth are affected by a wide range of explosive weapons, including landmines, students go to school not knowing whether they will safely return home, play in public gardens or outside their homes, not knowing whether they will be the next victim of the next car bomb or suicide bomb attack, go to the field for farming or grazing, not knowing if or when they could step on a mine.

That is why Iraqis wanted to make their voice heard through their participation in this particular international forum, in which they presented a song and made genuine appeals, urging the world leaders to pay more attention to the deadly consequences of landmines' proliferation and continuing violence in their country, and how it impacts their daily lives.

"Let's replace the minefields with flowers", the song said, because when "flowers are killed, no conscience can rest".

In her presentation, Member of Parliament, Dr Samira al-Moussawi, who heads the Women, Family and Child Commission, focused on the extremely worrying situation in Iraq, where millions of acres are uninhabitable and unexploitable, as a consequence of mines' dispersal. "There is an estimated 25 million mines dispersed throughout the Iraqi territory", she said, reminding that this number equals the number of Iraqi citizens. "These mines are randomly scattered on more than 40,000 contaminated areas, including 3,000 in Baghdad and its neighbouring provinces, and represent a threat to up to 8 million people", she continued. According to Dr al-Moussawi "those death fields are estimated at 20 % of the total landmines in the 83 worldwide contaminated countries".

While these figures are only part of the arsenal of weapons and ammunitions which continue to kill and injure innocent civilians in this war-torn country, a 10-year old student told the gathering "My father encourages me to go to school without fear, to show terrorists that they will not stop us from living".