



# General Assembly

Sixty-third session

**48<sup>th</sup>** plenary meeting

Thursday, 13 November 2008, 10 a.m.  
New York

Official Records

*President:* Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann ..... (Nicaragua)

*The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.*

## Agenda item 45 (continued)

### Culture of peace

**Report of the Secretary-General (A/63/262)**

**Note by the Secretary-General (A/63/127)**

**Draft resolutions (A/63/L.23 and  
A/63/L.24/Rev.1)**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Hermann Gröhe, Minister of State and Special Envoy of the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany.

**Mr. Gröhe** (Germany): On behalf of the Federal Government of Germany, I wish to underline the great importance we attach to fostering a culture of peace. We therefore welcome the convening of this summit. I should like to express my full support for the statement of the European Union delivered at the 47th meeting by Alain Juppé on behalf of the French presidency.

Achieving and safeguarding peace and security, making a life in freedom and dignity possible for all people — these goals constitute the core of the United Nations mandate. They have not become any less significant in 2008. On the contrary; today they still require us to do everything in our power to reach them.

The past years have shown again and again that national and international conflicts demand more than just national, intergovernmental or international peace efforts, though those are and will remain necessary. In

order to ensure lasting success, such political efforts at all levels require the support of a culture of peace within our societies, as well as among States. Achieving this culture of peace requires the efforts of the forces that hold our societies together. That especially includes religious beliefs and other worldviews.

His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia was therefore right to ask what contributions religions can make to a culture of peace.

We can find impressive examples throughout history and up to our own time of people in all religions who, through their belief in an almighty creator, a just judge or a merciful father, were inspired to perform great acts of humanity and to show compassion and love to their fellow human beings, especially those in need. At the same time, in all religions we find examples of how they are abused in claims to political power and even of how they have claimed absolute political power for themselves.

Even when religious convictions are misused to justify hate and violence, general suspicion of a certain religion, or of religious beliefs at all, is not appropriate. For example, if Islamist terrorists and extremists distort their religion, that in no way justifies any kind of Islamophobia.

What is needed in response to such misuses, however, is the willingness of religions to engage in self-critical reflection on such distortions. This willingness must also assure that there is no room for condescending arrogance towards those of other faiths.

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It can pave the way for mutual ethical conviction that lays the foundation for common service to peace, justice and the preservation of creation.

Consider what people of different religious faiths could contribute to a culture of peace if they were aware, for example, that the golden rule of treating others as you would like to be treated can be found in nearly identical language among the teachings of the great Greek philosophers as well as of the philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment, just as it can be found in Confucianism, Buddhism and Hinduism, in the Talmud, the Christian Gospels and in the Islamic hadith collection.

We have a common ground for assuming our common global responsibility. At the same time, differences do not have to be denied. The conviction that we all share more or less the same beliefs is not necessary for us to be able to respect each other or other cultures and religions. Our readiness to treat each other respectfully proves itself precisely in those moments when we are aware of the differences in our convictions and can clearly name them and yet still view each other as equals.

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” Today we are still committed to this principle, taken from Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In consequence, those committed to universal human dignity, those who want to engage religious communities and believers of different faiths, as well as adherents to non-religious worldviews, for a culture of peace must embrace freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as laid out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration.

Recognizing the significance of religious freedom in no way implies that other human rights are less important. When the State exerts strict control over religious services, the prayers of the faithful, religious education of children or charitable actions, that expresses the totality of its claim to power even in the most personal aspects of everybody's life.

All people must enjoy freedom of religion. The principles of freedom and equality forbid people of a certain faith or culture from arbitrarily limiting the freedom of those who think differently.

It is also unacceptable to put the equal dignity and the equal rights of women in question on the ground of religious or ideological doctrine.

Time and again, religious feelings have been offended worldwide. I myself, as a Christian, have shared the bitter experience of my religious feelings being offended. However, those violations never justify violence. The rule of law and respect for others' freedom of thought must also prevail in such difficult situations. We cannot accept religious intolerance towards those who think differently. We commit ourselves to constantly fight any form of anti-Semitism.

Freedom of religion necessarily includes freedom of choice. A person must be free to decide if she or he wants to profess a certain faith. This includes that every person has the right to convert to another faith. Thus it is unacceptable that laws in some countries even today threaten those who want to convert with death.

It is time to put an end to the harassment, terror and murder that force members of religious minorities to flee their homes and countries. Freedom of religion is about the individual's freedom to practice her or his religion or worldview, alone or with others, publicly or privately. And it is necessarily about the right of religious communities to organize themselves freely, to serve their members and to contribute to all aspects of public life. In doing so, they will play an important role for a culture of peace.

The diversity of world cultures and religions is a feature that has marked human development. Considering worldwide migration and globalization, regions that are shaped by only one religion are the exception. Multiculturalism and multireligiosity are often a reality.

Simultaneously, the understandable desire to confirm or preserve one's own identity exists. In this situation, it is more vital than ever to provide young people in particular with the basics of a culture of peace and the understanding that all people have the right to equality and freedom. There is a need to make young people, and ourselves, aware of the silent harbingers of discrimination and religious intolerance, of how prejudice is stirred up or of how entire groups — those with a different skin colour or different beliefs — are stigmatized.

Respect for one another and interest in one another must be the basis for an interreligious dialogue. Treating one another respectfully does not have to exclude a search for truth. However, what must

be ruled out is forcing one's own beliefs on others through violence. In recent decades, there have been numerous initiatives for intercultural and interreligious dialogue in our societies, between States and at the level of the United Nations. Politics can and should support such initiatives.

At its core, however, this dialogue — and this also includes our understanding of religious freedom — must be developed within the religious communities themselves. What we need is the commitment of religious communities, not the creation of new structures or institutions at the political level, whether as part of the United Nations or in other multilateral forums.

For decades now, important things have been happening in dialogues among religious communities. Jews, Christians and Muslims have learned much from and about one another in these sometimes painful debates. The increased participation of other religious traditions — not least the great religious traditions of Asia — would certainly be welcome in these dialogues.

When people can profess their faith without fear, especially if they belong to a religious minority, when religious communities have the opportunity to participate in shaping human interaction in freedom and when all people — regardless of their faith or world view — enjoy mutual respect for their worth, we will know that we are moving towards a culture of peace.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Abdulkarim Al-Eryani, former Prime Minister and Special Adviser to the President of the Republic of Yemen.

**Mr. Al-Eryani** (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): It is truly historic and highly significant that this high-level meeting is being held within the framework of the General Assembly to strengthen the culture of peace and dialogue among representatives of cultures and religions in all their diversity. Undoubtedly, the Organization is the most appropriate forum in which to promote dialogue among religions and cultures. As former Secretary-General Kofi Annan has said, the United Nations is truly an Organization that can harmonize cultures and religions and a forum in which peoples can meet and share the benefits of such dialogue with their cultures and societies, which enables them to truly flourish.

This meeting has been convened to reaffirm that a gathering of cultures and human beliefs reflects the diversity of human civilization. That is why this meeting is so important, because it is aimed at promoting a culture of dialogue among all representatives of cultures and religions throughout the world. This meeting also has a particularly historic aspect, because it was conceived in the city of Mecca, towards which the eyes of more than a billion Muslims turn every day. Here, I should like to refer to the historic initiative launched by King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia. This meeting follows the Madrid Conference that was held in July of this year. Both initiatives were undertaken by the Muslim World League under the auspices and leadership of the Saudi King.

Indeed, the call of Mecca is an appeal for dialogue based on the Islamic faith, which encourages us to come to God on the basis of a constructive dialogue, because, as God told us, you have your faith and I have mine. This call from Mecca is a tradition found in all religious beliefs and philosophical traditions throughout the world: human societies are called upon to engage in dialogue, which, in fact, is a prerequisite for human progress.

The Madrid Declaration, adopted as the outcome of the meeting held by the Muslim World League under the leadership of the Saudi King, reaffirmed that equality should prevail among all men and women in the diversity of their cultures and faiths. That is one of the lessons of the Koran and a prerequisite for human progress. Respect for others, for the cultures of peoples and for their freedom to govern themselves is the basis of all human relations. It is a teaching found in all religions and cultural traditions, and it enables us to exchange information and knowledge, which can lead to happiness throughout the world.

We Muslims, who base our world view on *ijtihad*, which is a truly exegetical effort to understand the world and the other, believe that the Western world must revise all of its concepts and notions about Muslims and the Muslim world. According to Roger Jaroudi there must be a cross-fertilization among civilizations and a genuine dialogue, in which all seek to understand the other without preconditions.

Today, more than ever before, we sorely need a culture of peace based on dialogue that will overcome misunderstanding. No one has a monopoly on truth;

indeed, to believe that is to turn one's back on truth. The tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the terrorist events of 11 September 2001 spread fear in the Western world about the emergence of a new enemy called Islam. That belief is born of mutual ignorance, which has spread imaginary fears based on the false notion that a clash of civilizations is unavoidable. To believe in a clash of civilizations is to forget that Islam was cross-pollinated with Greek culture and disseminated it, thus fostering well-being for humanity as a whole and helping to inspire the renaissance in Europe. That was a historic era, which opened up new horizons for humanity.

It is our duty and responsibility, both within the United Nations and through bilateral or multilateral channels, to truly promote genuine dialogue among cultures and beliefs. We must promote such dialogue by every means at our disposal. Yemen and Switzerland have made their contribution in this area by holding symposia at which illustrious academic figures are invited to speak.

Finally, we would like to appeal for the adoption of measures to be followed up by an expert committee comprising representatives of all religions, cultures and civilizations.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now call on His Excellency Mr. Theodoros Kassimis, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Greece.

**Mr. Kassimis** (Greece): I am truly pleased to commend, today, in this forum, Saudi Arabia's current initiative on interreligious dialogue, launched under the auspices of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud.

Greece aligns itself with the statement delivered by Mr. Alain Juppé, Special Envoy of the President of the French Republic, on behalf of the European Union.

For Greece, this is very much a vindication of our own policies in this field, as we were among the very first countries in the West to open concrete channels of communication and dialogue with the Muslim world, even before the Second World War. Such dialogue is maintained at many levels. As a State, Greece maintains numerous and well-established bilateral contacts and is a party to many multilateral forums within the United Nations system, in the European Union and in specific activities, such as the Alliance of Civilizations.

However, it is at the level of institutions of faith that Greece and the Greek world enjoy a truly privileged position, thanks to the crucial role played in both ecumenical and interreligious dialogue by the ancient churches of the Greek world. Indeed, although most of them are incorporated under the laws of the lands in which they are established, they are very much at the root of modern Greek culture and civilization.

Such a background was essential to the Greek world's establishment of a leading position in the dialogue with Islam and Judaism, thanks to a continuous interaction with both religions for almost 2,000 years, the lack of colonial baggage in its history and a deep understanding of and respect for the mentality of the peoples of the area.

At the same time, we are well aware of our position in the Western world. Democracy is very much Greece's own contribution to European and Western civilization and the early Greek world was a major contributor to the fashioning of Roman law and Christian ethics. We thus cherish the community of our values, along with other societies that have been formed in the same ethical and philosophical matrix.

We also know that we hold most of these values in common with our Muslim and Jewish partners and neighbours. In this context, the Saudi initiative on interfaith dialogue is most welcome. We look forward to a close and fruitful collaboration in this context, one in which Greece and Europe will contribute what they have achieved over the years, especially in defining human rights and in incorporating them into their legal systems. Indeed, we consider freedom of religion and worship, together with freedom of thought and expression, to be at the very foundations of our philosophy on life and on the position of mankind in the universe.

Apart from dialogue, however, we need to embark on a large-scale campaign for religious education. We need to inform our peoples about the true message of our respective religions. We live in a materialistic era, in which some are attempting to uproot the eternal and universal values of our societies. This has provided an opportunity to certain forces to violently alter the values of faith and to substitute them with messages of hate and division. There is, however, no religion, no religious figure, nor any sacred script that preaches hatred among people. On the contrary, the divine commandment common to all our faiths is a

message of love, solidarity, peaceful coexistence and respect for all people on Earth. This has to be the message of our dialogue, and it is with this message that our children should be brought up.

Eighteen months ago, in an attempt to build bridges of peace and cooperation in our region, we launched an initiative called "Building the future". We organized a summer camp in Greece for children aged 12 to 14 from Egypt, Jordan, Palestine, Israel and Greece. Twenty children from each of these countries participated. Boys and girls, Muslims, Jews and Christians, lived together for three weeks. We did not allow anyone to poison them with false messages. We left them by themselves, armed with the religious beliefs they had from their parents, their pure souls and their passion to enjoy life. These children developed a dialogue of their own through their games, the traditional dances of their homelands, the artwork that they crafted together and the happiness that showed on their faces. The outcome of their dialogue could be seen when the time came to bid farewell and is reflected in the letters sent by their parents.

Our dialogue here is a more difficult one. We have to fight the forces of hatred and division. I am certain that if we all pull together and believe in this common cause, we will emerge as victors for world peace, solidarity and mutual understanding, so that we may be able to prove what our respective faiths teach us: that we all are children of the same God.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Miguel Abdón Saguier, Senator and member of the Commission of External Relations and International Affairs of the Republic of Paraguay.

**Mr. Saguier** (Paraguay) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are pleased to be here as further testimony of the importance that my country and its Government attribute to the culture of peace.

Paraguay would like resolutely to uphold the noble mission of the United Nations and its Members in achieving a broad and in-depth understanding among the different cultures. That is why we enthusiastically support initiatives of dialogue among different peoples, Governments and religions.

Humankind, unique in its origin and diverse in its cultural manifestation, has, by means of dialogue, its only way to try to overcome the injustice and violence

that demean it. Dialogue has as a starting point acceptance of the other, even if that "other" is different than myself, not only that the "other" may live but live together, not only that the "other" may exist but coexist. Unlike dialogue, in violence there is no acceptance, but only the attempt to eliminate the other.

Dialogue can take place only if we accept, or even better tolerate, the cultural and religious characteristics that distinguish each people, each national society, that form an integral part of humankind.

To avoid misunderstandings that can lead to tragic consequences, it is essential to understand that suicidal indifference towards bloody and premeditated incidents — which in most cases mean that the innocent pay for the sinners — is not tolerance. The protagonists, the fanatics, want to show by means of violence the supposed strength of their demands, when in fact what they are doing is obscuring the justification of their grievances.

Justifiably, the Spanish philosopher Fernando Savater says that fanaticism is in no way strength of conviction, but, quite the contrary, panic in the face of possible contamination by what is different. The fanatic cannot bear to live among those who think differently for fear of discovering that he is not so sure of what he says he believes. Thus, Nietzsche determined that fanaticism was the only strength of will of which the weak are capable.

A number of leaders pointed out here yesterday that religion was not the cause of violence, specifically terrorism, but rather the pretext of those who corrupt the faith of their peoples for political ends. In that way, they claim that it is only the end, not the means that matters, trying to obscure the fact that the means determine the end. History teaches us that those who gain power through violence will always have to resort to violence to maintain that power. That is not the path towards humanist ethics or religious piety, whatever the religion, be it called Christianity, Judaism, Islam or any other.

When we speak of tolerance, we cannot forget the Catholic belief set out in the resolutions of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and in the encyclicals of John Paul XXIII and Paul VI, which present us with the profound and thought-provoking ideas that even those who are mistaken still retain their human dignity.

Paraguay and its Government, deeply imbued with humanist ideas, pledge their support for the initiative before us today (A/63/L.24/Rev.1), in the hope that this important high-level meeting will achieve practical results for all nations of the world in the search for cooperation, understanding, justice and peace which are so essential for the moral and material progress of all our nations.

We cannot conclude this statement without expressing our gratitude to His Majesty, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud; the President of the General Assembly; Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann; and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for this important initiative that has brought us together today.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to His Excellency Mr. Masahiko Koumura, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan.

**Mr. Koumura** (Japan) (*spoke in Japanese; English text provided by the delegation*): I am honoured, Sir, to have the opportunity to address you today as the Special Envoy of the Prime Minister of Japan, Mr. Taro Aso, and on behalf of the Government of Japan.

We are gathered here today at this high-level meeting of the General Assembly on dialogue among religions and civilizations in response to the strong initiative taken by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Japan welcomes the convening of this meeting, just as it welcomed and attached great importance to the Muslim dialogue, held in Mecca in June, and the World Conference on Dialogue, held in Madrid in July.

In January 1999, as Foreign Minister of Japan, I made a speech in Ramallah entitled: "Building a New Bridge between Japan and the Middle East toward the Twenty-First Century". I urged then that we profit from the lessons we learned during the century that was just coming to a close, filled as it had been with war and conflict, and make the twenty-first century a time of peace and prosperity. Instead, in the decade that has passed since I was in Ramallah, what we have seen in the Middle East and too many other regions around the world is more conflict and incidents that have only served to heighten tensions.

Such disorder, strife and conflict have many causes. Tremendous efforts have been made to address them in the United Nations and other forums. Yet, if we are ever to succeed in devising better, more durable solutions, it will be because the parties concerned and the international community have the political will to do so. It will be because we choose to engage in dialogue over violence. Certainly, it is impossible to resolve a conflict unless each party first recognizes the other's existence and demonstrates respect for their ethnicity, culture and religion.

We need also to take into account the impact that globalization has had on the world. Through the rapid expansion of trade and the development of information and communication technologies, the daily lives of many people have been made easier. At the same time, globalization has removed many of the barriers that earlier separated groups with different identities and different ways of life. As they now confront one another, conventional authority and order are being shaken. New tensions are piled on old, a situation that can be expected to continue until a new, more stable order is established.

We have an obligation now to pool our wisdom so as to maximize the benefits of globalization and minimize the harm it can do. People who face a crisis of identity are vulnerable. When a small band of extremists succeeds in inciting even the slightest friction among ethnic or religious groups, the fires of distrust and hatred are stoked, and yesterday's peaceful neighbours suddenly become wary of one another, or worse. We should not regard differences in culture or ideology as handicaps. Far from it; they are assets that can infuse a society with creativity, causing it to flower and endow its members with greater tolerance, and even appreciation, of what each has to offer. For this to happen, however, greater political leadership is required.

Equally pressing in confronting the global issues of our time, the nations and regions of the world must work in concert, in a firm and courageous manner, to secure the common interests of humankind, which extend far beyond petty differences. This is clearly how we must confront the current financial crisis, which is unprecedented in scale. In contrast to the dark era nearly 80 years ago, when the Great Depression plunged the nations of the world into the Second World War, today we know that we need to coordinate the

policies we adopt if we are to surmount this challenge and end the vicious spiral of financial turmoil.

On the issue of climate change, the leaders of the G-8 said at the Hokkaido Toyako Summit earlier this year that they shared the long-term objective of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 per cent by the year 2050. They understood that failure to do so would lead to even more global warming and deal a massive blow to humankind and the environment of the planet that is our home.

The same can be said about the Millennium Development Goals. We know that the first victims of natural disasters and conflicts, no matter where in the world they occur, are always the poor. Leaving behind those who are weak and vulnerable makes a society unstable and impedes the progress of the reforms for which we have promised to work.

With this in mind, Japan has been striving to make the most effective use of official development assistance and other tools to assist the nations and regions of the world to promote stability and prosperity through efforts such as those being made to create a "corridor of peace and prosperity". Japan has also been extending cooperation in such areas as education, the development of human resources and helping women to live independent lives.

We know that in the course of human history there have been long periods during which peoples whose identities reside in their different cultures, religions and ethnicities have coexisted peacefully. Tolerance, religious symbiosis and coexistence have been the norm among followers of Islam and in the societies of the Middle East in general. In Asia, whether in India, China or elsewhere, different religions have managed for much of history to exist in proximity to one another without the eruption of conflict. For its part, Japan has benefited since ancient times from the products of the civilizations of China and India. Japan has also absorbed the fruits of Western culture, including universal values such as freedom and democracy.

Precisely because Japan's unique culture assumed its present form in this manner, it knows the value of dynamic exchange and interaction with other cultures. Japan, therefore, intends to contribute actively to dialogue and the promotion of harmony among the religions and civilizations of the world. It is already cooperating with Islamic countries in conducting the

dialogue among civilizations between Japan and the Islamic world and we shall continue to engage in exchanges of this kind.

In closing, let me once again express my deep appreciation to King Abdullah for the initiative he has taken and salute the conviction and courage shown by all those who have supported it. I hope that at this meeting we shall reaffirm our determination and commitment to take strong, joint action and ensure solidarity and peaceful coexistence among the peoples of the world.

#### **Address by Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the United States of America.

*Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

**President Bush:** Laura and I are pleased to be back here at the United Nations, and I am grateful for the opportunity to once again address the General Assembly.

I want to thank King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for his leadership and for convincing us all to come together to speak about faith. I appreciate the participants who recognize the transformative and uplifting power of faith.

One of my core beliefs is that there is an Almighty God, and that every man, woman and child on the face of this Earth bears His image. Many years ago, faith changed my life. Faith has sustained me through the challenges and the joys of my Presidency. And faith will guide me for the rest of my days.

I know many of the leaders gathered in this Assembly have been influenced by faith, as well. We may profess different creeds and worship in different places, but our faith leads us to common values. We believe God calls us to love our neighbors, and to treat one another with compassion and respect. We believe

God calls us to honour the dignity of all life, and to speak against cruelty and injustice. We believe God calls us to live in peace, and to oppose all those who use His name to justify violence and murder. Freedom is God's gift to every man, woman, and child, and that freedom includes the right of all people to worship as they see fit.

Sixty years ago, members of the United Nations General Assembly acknowledged this truth when we adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration proclaims that everyone has the right to choose or change religions, and the right to worship in private or in public.

The United States strongly supported the adoption of the Universal Declaration. In fact, the American delegation was led by a former First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt. When we voted for the Universal Declaration, the American people reaffirmed a conviction that dates back to our earliest days. Our nation was founded by people seeking haven from religious persecution. The First Amendment of our Constitution guarantees the free exercise of religion for all. And through the generations, our nation has helped defend the religious liberty of others — from liberating the concentration camps of Europe to protecting Muslims in places such as Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq.

Today, the United States is carrying on that noble tradition by making religious liberty a central element of our foreign policy. We have established a Commission on International Religious Freedom to monitor the state of religious liberty worldwide. We strongly encourage nations to understand that religious freedom is the foundation of a healthy and hopeful society. We are not afraid to stand with religious dissidents and believers who practise their faith, even where it is unwelcome.

One of the best ways to safeguard religious freedom is to aid the rise of democracy. Democratic Governments do not all look alike. Each reflects the history and traditions of its own people, but one of the defining features of any democracy is that it makes room for people of all backgrounds and all faiths. Democracies allow people with diverse views to discuss their differences and live in harmony.

The expansion of democracy also represents the most promising path to peace. People who are free to express their opinions can challenge the ideologies of

hate. They can defend their religious beliefs and speak out against those seeking to twist them to evil ends. They can prevent their children from falling under the sway of extremists by giving them a more hopeful alternative.

Over the past eight years, I have been privileged to see how freedom and faith can lift up lives and lead the world towards peace. I remember clearly a congregation in the State of Kansas in my country whose members stayed together and prayed together, even when a tornado had torn down their church. I have seen faithful caregivers on the continent of Africa who take AIDS patients given up for dead and restore them to health. I have seen mothers across the Middle East whose faith leads them to dream of a better and more peaceful future for their children — a dream shared by mothers all around the world.

I appreciate every nation participating in today's dialogue. Through dialogue, we can draw closer to the day when our prayers for freedom and peace are answered and every person on Earth enjoys the rights and dignity granted by an Almighty God.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the United States of America for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. George W. Bush, President of the United States of America, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

#### **Address by Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan.

*Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, was escorted into the General Assembly Hall.*

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I have the honour to welcome to the United Nations His Excellency Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

**President Zardari:** We stand at a critical crossroads as we gather in this great Hall of the nations. We hope that we have the opportunity to start



afresh and rebuild a better world for our children to prosper.

Yet, we still confront a dangerous world of confrontation and terror, threatening to provoke the clash of civilizations that this dialogue was instituted to prevent. There remain those in this world who thrive in chaos, drawing power by pitting thought against thought, faith against faith and people against people. That was surely not the world that man was gifted by our God. For the children of Ibrahim, the world was meant to be a meeting ground of civilizations, ideas and human dignity.

As the elected representative of 180 million Pakistanis suffering from that menace of hatred, I reject those who would divide us and rally around those who would unite us as creations of the one and only God. I take that inspiration from my elder brother, a man of wisdom and action, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud. I commend and congratulate him on having the courage and vision to convene this meeting on interfaith dialogue. Many men talk change. He brings it about.

In taking that initiative, His Majesty has, in fact, revived the great Islamic tradition of reconciliation and inclusion. I find that this worthy act stems from His Majesty's wisdom, which is leading his great country today on the path of progress, while following the fundamentals of our religion.

On the one hand, wisdom has guided the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to build its first modern university for women, designed to be the world's largest female centre of higher education. That may surely be considered a historic milestone for the empowerment of women in the Kingdom and the Muslim world. On the other, His Majesty is the first Saudi leader to have travelled to the Vatican, opening dialogue between the two largest religions of our time. His Majesty effectively laid the foundations for bringing the followers of different religions and beliefs closer to one another at the Madrid Conference.

As His Majesty's tireless efforts yield results and a galaxy of world leaders gather here today because of His Majesty's initiative, it is important for me to recognize and acknowledge his noble contribution to the cause of human unity and dignity. I wish to thank the Assembly and His Majesty for all he has done for us.

For me and for the nation of Pakistan, our participation today at this event represents more than just an honour. For us, it is a personal opportunity to advance the message of a moderate, modern and loving Islam, which guided the work of our beloved leader, Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who sacrificed her life for the cause of tolerance and dialogue and the avoidance of a clash of civilizations. That message is a central element of the Madrid Declaration, and thus it is especially fitting that we join together with Members today to continue the work for which she gave her life.

*Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

I come here as the representative of the 180 million people of a country that was created with deep ties to Islam, but from the very first days, in the vision of our founder the Quaid-i-Azam, was dedicated to the tolerance of the Holy Koran. Islam is tolerant of other religions and cultures and of dissent. Allah tells us over and over again, through the Holy Koran, that he created people of different views and perspectives to see the world in different ways and that diversity is good, natural and part of God's plan. The Koran's message is open to the full participation of all people in the life of their societies and it encourages knowledge and scientific experimentation.

Islam is grounded in the past and reaches out to the future and one of its central guiding principles is the reason we engage here today. Islam accepts as a fundamental principle the fact that humans were created within different societies and religions and they will remain different. In the words of the Holy Book, "If your Lord had pleased He would certainly have made people a single nation, and they shall continue to differ" (*The Holy Koran, XI:118*).

Our world is home to people of many religions and creeds and they are all worthy of respect. All of God's creations deserve a better life in which the basic rights to food, education, shelter and the protection of their families is guaranteed. Above all, it is the basic dignity as human beings that must be universally recognized and respected.

In his last sermon on the occasion of his last hajj, the Holy Prophet of Islam — may peace be upon him — said: "You are all children of Adam, and Adam was created from clay. You are all equal". Throughout recorded history, the enemies of peace have often invoked faith as an instrument of creating disunity.

King Abdullah, in his wisdom, has condemned those who would use religion to advance a rigid and extremist political agenda. He has said that religion must be a bridge bringing nations together, not a wall keeping nations apart. It is therefore critical that we undertake the task of building upon faith as a means of finding common ground between different nations and civilizations.

It was that principle that prompted Pakistan and the Philippines to be the original sponsors of resolution 62/90, entitled "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace". So as we gather here to move forward towards those goals, let us not talk of what divides us, but rather of what unites us as the creation of the same god.

I come from a country where the struggle for Islamic principles of gender equality, tolerance and reconciliation has brought us to the centre of the international stage. It is a measure of that struggle that the first woman ever elected Prime Minister of a Muslim country was from Pakistan. It is a measure of that struggle that twice my late wife and leader Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto led the country as Prime Minister. Following in her footsteps, we made a woman Speaker of the Parliament, again for the first time anywhere in the Muslim world. And in coming generations, we hope to have a woman as president and head of State.

In following the true spirit of Islam, the great leader of my country Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto fought and laid down her life advocating dialogue and tolerance and opposing extremism. Indeed, the last act of our great leader was to write a book entitled *Reconciliation*, which that was published after her assassination. In it, she rejected the so-called clash of civilizations as an attempt to twist the values of a great and noble religion. In her last words, she lays out a political vision of reconciliation that must guide us in the days and years ahead. Those views are the guiding principles of the newly elected democratic Government of Pakistan. Her example continues to lead us today, not only in Pakistan, but in every corner of the world.

In her honour, let us unite to create a world of tolerance and an end to bigotry. Let us unite to create a world of understanding and respect. Let us unite to

build a world of peace and stability. Let us unite to create the world of reconciliation for which she died.

To me, there is nothing more un-Islamic than discrimination. There is nothing more un-Islamic than violence against women. Above all, there is nothing more un-Islamic than terrorism — the killing of innocent men, women and children — a crime expressly prohibited in the text of all holy books.

Unfortunately, at a time when most Muslims are advocating interfaith dialogue, we are also witnessing events that frustrate our call for dialogue. We hear hate speeches across countries and regions in which Islam as a religion is attacked. Hate speech against Islam also leads to injustices against Muslims. Indeed, the delusional fear of Islam has been rising. This is exactly what the terrorists had hoped to provoke. Those in the West who accept that are falling into the trap of the terrorists. The delusional fear of our religion has created a new form of discrimination and is giving rise to new tensions.

Let us translate the dynamic messages of our respective religions for the good of humanity and not to create strife. Let us turn the message of hope embodied in our faiths into living and practical reality. To that end, I propose consensus on an international agenda wherein hate speech aimed at inciting people against any religion is unacceptable and injustice and discrimination on the mere basis of one's faith are discouraged; not only in words but through meaningful actions. Bigotry manifested in Islamophobia and anti-Semitism must be combated. Dialogue and not discord between civilizations and faiths must be encouraged. Nations with little resources that are caught in the crossfire of extremism should be strengthened and aided by the international community.

Let us not isolate people; let us engage people. Violence is an act of desperation. Let us commit ourselves to eliminating the root causes of extremism and terrorism, giving all people in all societies renewed faith in their countries, in their laws and in the futures of their children. Let us hit the causes of the terrorist menace, not condemn its innocent victims. To us, Islam is about social justice and the emancipation of men and women. As such, we reach out to all of God's creations.

Islam is about serving the Muslim masses by ending poverty and backwardness and building peace and tolerance. As such, we reach out to all of God's

creations. Islam is opening the doors of knowledge for each and every citizen. As such, we reach out to all of God's creations.

We must also commit resources to dialogue and international cultural understanding. In Pakistan, we have already created the Benazir Democracy Institute. We have created the Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Foundation to expressly promote and encourage dialogue, inclusion and exchange. We should be encouraging the successor generation — those who will lead after us — to use education and exchange not only to adapt to modernity, but to use modernity and technology to change the world.

*The President returned to the Chair.*

Educating the nation's young people and international exchanges of students, scholars and intellectuals are part of our dream of reconciliation. On occasion of this meeting, we dedicate ourselves to this dream. We do so for the children of our children; we do so for a better tomorrow; and we do so to leave behind a world better than the one we found. This meeting on interfaith dialogue must be the beginning of a new journey for our nations, in the immortal word of my beloved wife, a journey of reconciliation.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Asif Ali Zardari, President of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.*

**Address by Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey**

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear as address by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey.

*Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey was escorted to the rostrum.*

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

**Mr. Erdoğan** (Turkey) (*spoke in Turkish; English text provided by the delegation*): I extend my heartfelt

greetings to all. We are gathered here today to consider one of the most sensitive issues facing our world. I am greatly honoured to be able to address the Assembly from this rostrum on the interfaith dialogue initiated by my brother, His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia. It is a matter of pride and joy for me to be here today.

The participation of so many heads of State and Government in this high-level meeting has justified the personal interest that His Majesty the King has taken in the issue of interfaith dialogue. Naturally, we are all aware of the underlying cause that has brought together such a distinguished gathering.

This cause, or phenomenon, if you will, is the alarming level of polarization, lack of understanding and discrimination prevalent in the international community. The precise nature of the steps to be taken in order to ensure respect for diversity, and their level of success, will have a profound effect on the character of international relations in the decades to come.

It is evident that the behavioural norms of 20th century are now out of date and that, in these modern times, our world faces numerous new risks and threats. Terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illicit trafficking and organized crime have assumed global dimensions. While enormous advances have been achieved in production and prosperity, we cannot claim that this prosperity has been shared equitably or that our world has become a safer place in which to live. In light of the tragic experiences we have all had to endure, I would maintain that either we are all secure, or none of us is secure.

This is especially true in the case of terrorism. I take this opportunity to emphasize the following point in particular. We should now put an end to perceptions of "good" terrorists and "bad" terrorists, and avoid providing refuge to terrorists of "others". Terrorism is crime against humanity, regardless of its source, pretext or ambition. We believe that if a person slays a man, it will be as if he had slain the whole of mankind, and that if a person saves a man from death, it will be as if he had saved the whole of mankind.

The risks and threats I mentioned earlier require, international cooperation and solidarity today more than ever. Unfortunately, we have not achieved much success in displaying common political will against these challenges. We have so far failed to overcome the polarization, lack of understanding and discrimination

prevalent in the international community. We need to achieve greater progress in that direction.

We should all note with satisfaction the steady increase in the number of individuals who perceive the need for respect for diversity and therefore wish to launch new initiatives or to contribute to existing efforts and endeavours. We thus welcome the initiative that my dear friend and brother, His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia, has launched in the field of theological dialogue. I wish to thank him again for his efforts.

Our theologians participated in the meeting of Muslim scholars held in Mecca in June 2008 and the subsequent World Conference on Dialogue co-hosted with Spain in Madrid in July 2008. This initiative will no doubt make a major contribution to the ongoing efforts for dialogue between faiths and cultures.

I believe that the exchange of views taking place as part of this high-level meeting yesterday and today should be considered as an indication of the heightened sensitivity of the international community. Other initiatives in this field also represent individual examples of the growing acknowledgement of this message and the greater acceptance of the fact that polarization and confrontation are detrimental. I note in particular the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace pursued by Pakistan and the Philippines, as well as the forum organized by Kazakhstan on the theme "Common world: progress through diversity".

Owing to its special geographic location, rich history and cultural heritage, Turkey feels an additional sense of responsibility in this process. The former President of Portugal, Mr. Jorge Sampaio, has been appointed High Representative of the Secretary-General for the Alliance of Civilizations, while the Group of Friends set up at the United Nations has continued to grow.

The Alliance of Civilizations today includes 78 countries and 13 international organizations. These achievements are an indication of the growing support of the international community for the principles and aims of the Alliance. The Alliance has proved that the fundamental values that bring us together, such as democracy, human rights and rule of law, are stronger than our cultural differences.

We need the contribution of all the existing initiatives in this field in order to limit the potential danger posed by extremists. We should work together to ensure the success of these initiatives. I regard these efforts as mutually reinforcing and complementary, rather than competing, endeavours.

The Alliance of Civilizations will seek to enhance its contribution under the umbrella of the United Nations and work to ensure that official policies and statements reflect a moderate and responsible approach.

Through their national strategies, members of the Group of Friends will endeavour to inform their own public opinion on the aims of the Alliance and to remedy the current shortfalls in dialogue by developing projects, especially in the fields of youth, media, education and migration.

In this vein, one of the most pressing issues concerns the compatibility of freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs. Freedom of expression is one of the indispensable elements of our civilization and the foundation upon which the other freedoms rest, together with freedom of faith. What I have in mind here is not the right to criticize or to question — the right to question is sacred in free societies. However, we regret to see that there is sometimes a very thin line between freedom of expression and provocative attitudes calling for discrimination and even glorifying violence. Such recent developments as the cartoon crisis, for instance, are sometimes too provocative to be explained within the context of freedom of expression.

We are under an absolute obligation to reflect upon the impact of such expressions within different cultures, religions and regions. Only then can we achieve a better understanding of one another. By respecting each other's sensitivities we therefore avoid making the mistake of branding as "the other" those who are merely different.

I should also point out that, for global peace, we also need to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict and to stabilize Iraq in a sustainable framework. We need to live together. We need to respect one another. That is what I believe. Conflict is easy, whereas reconciliation is difficult. I firmly believe that, through our genuine and determined efforts, we will choose and succeed in the difficult option.

I wish to conclude my statement by inviting participants here today to the summit that will be organized in Istanbul in 2009. Participants may be aware that the second forum of the Alliance of Civilizations will be held on 2 and 3 April 2009 in the city of Istanbul, which embraces two continents and three monotheistic faiths. I will be honoured to host participants in Istanbul and to provide the opportunity to continue our deliberations at a location that overlooks the Bosphorus. I would like once more to thank my dear brother, the King of Saudi Arabia, for initiating this gathering. I would also like to wish the Assembly the greatest success and extend it my deepest respect and salutations.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey for the statement he has just made.

*Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey, was escorted from the rostrum.*

**The President:** I now call on His Excellency Mr. Francisco Javier Rojo, President of the Senate of the Kingdom of Spain.

**Mr. Rojo** (Spain) (*spoke in Spanish*): Mr. President, it is a great honour for me to accept your invitation to participate in this General Assembly debate on the agenda item "Culture of peace", which provides us with an excellent opportunity to exchange views regarding the fundamental issues for coexistence and understanding among our societies.

I would also like to express our profound gratitude to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, whose impetus given to this plenary meeting has brought together numerous heads of State and Government as well as other eminent personalities.

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered yesterday by France on behalf of the European Union. I would now like to take this opportunity to share with the Assembly some of the recent experiences and views of Spain in relation to this topic that has brought us together here.

The Spanish Government attaches great importance to all the initiatives undertaken to promote dialogue and understanding among the world's peoples, cultures and religions. We share the concern about the growth of intolerance in all its aspects, and in that

regard, we support Saudi Arabia's endeavour for progress to be made through dialogue, in mutual understanding among peoples, contributing to the elimination of extremism and radical and violent attitudes that can emerge within any community.

The initiative of the Philippines and Pakistan fits into this framework in favour of promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace.

Spain was pleased to receive the request by King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for Madrid to host the World Conference on Dialogue last July. We were honoured by this choice because, as His Majesty King Juan Carlos I stated, Spain constructed its democracy based on tolerance, mutual respect and coexistence. At the Madrid Conference, a great number of representatives belonging to different religions met, recalled the objectives of the United Nations, and praised dialogue as an ideal means to reach a better understanding in human relationships as well as peaceful coexistence among nations. It is our fervent hope that this noble effort in interreligious dialogue will be fruitful and foster the desired continuity.

Spain is a non-confessional State in which, on the basis of freedom of all religions and beliefs, there is separation of Church and State. This does not prevent the development of dialogue and collaboration between the Government and the different creeds, because it is based on mutual respect. Furthermore, and to a great extent due to the phenomenon of immigration, Spanish society is undergoing a growing diversification, which is reflected in a renewed interest by my country in all those initiatives aimed at resolving the challenges raised by diversity, both inside and outside our borders.

The Alliance of Civilizations, created in 2005 within the United Nations following the initiative of the heads of Governments of Spain and Turkey, has been a clear reflection of this concern. Its main objective is to promote in a practical manner understanding and cooperation among States and peoples of all cultures and religions within the framework of the principles and values of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Alliance of Civilizations is a political initiative of preventive diplomacy that, as was expressed yesterday by the Secretary-General in his statement before this Assembly, aspires to overcome

conflicts stemming from misperceptions of different cultures and religions, with no interference in interreligious dialogue as such, which properly belongs to the representatives of the confessions themselves.

In a first phase, the Alliance has focused its efforts in exploring the root causes of the polarization of cultures and societies throughout the world and in proposing practical recommendations to counteract forces that unfortunately cause an increase in radicalism and extremism, which can lead to violence.

With the appointment by the Secretary-General of Mr. Jorge Sampaio as High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, a second stage begins, the cornerstone of which is the development of an action plan for 2007-2009. The plan includes a group of specific measures in projects relating to four fundamental areas: youth, media, education and migration.

The first forum of the Alliance of Civilizations was held in Madrid on 15 and 16 January 2008, and it brought together more than 500 participants, including political leaders and representatives of Governments and international organizations, as well as members of various groups of civil society, including religious communities and media and business leaders.

The report submitted to the Secretary-General by the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Sampaio, and distributed to the General Assembly in document A/63/336, contains the results of the first Madrid forum as well as the main activities of the Alliance during its first year of work.

The Alliance of Civilizations is achieving significant progress and I am convinced that the second forum to be held in April 2009 in Istanbul will constitute a fundamental milestone in the important road ahead. Furthermore, the great number of countries and organizations that are actively participating highlights the fact that States and civil society wish to promote all those initiatives for dialogue and cooperation that foster understanding and tolerance among our peoples.

Consequently, I am confident that, in the near future, the General Assembly will be able to renew its support and impetus to the Alliance of Civilizations and to its important activities. I am convinced that it will strengthen the values of dialogue, understanding

and cooperation necessary for the progressive building of a real culture of peace in the world.

**The President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chair of the delegation of Brazil.

**Mrs. Viotti** (Brazil): I wish to congratulate the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin AbdulAziz Al Saud, for his initiative to convene this high-level meeting. Building a culture of peace through dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions is a concrete way of giving effect to the principles and purposes of the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I also welcome the significant contributions made by a number of Member States to such dialogue through initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations, in which Brazil is particularly active. Those initiatives complement each other. The United Nations is well placed to help establish synergies among them.

As we all know, the relations among cultures and religions have a long history, a history with bright spots and somber moments, like that of human existence itself. The task before us today is to help build on that history so as to bring about enhanced understanding, mutual respect and cooperation. Achieving such a goal has become an imperative in a world that is not only globalized but also populated by increasingly diverse societies.

In several countries, multiculturalism is not a choice but a reflection of either complex historical processes or evolving social structures. Long-term stability in those countries can only be achieved in an environment of peaceful coexistence of different cultural backgrounds. Their ultimate success as societies depends on their ability to progressively integrate all citizens into a larger whole, richer than the sum of its original parts.

A similar logic should prevail at the international level. The multiplicity of cultures certainly poses challenges. However, once the community of nations values cultural diversity as a sign of collective strength, those challenges will be more easily overcome. This is a task for which the United Nations seems particularly well prepared.

Building peace through religious tolerance and inter-faith dialogue is also an imperative in an age marked by both secularism and religious

fundamentalism. The foundations of such dialogue rest on deep-rooted values shared by all religions: the pursuit of peace and virtue, human solidarity and the fundamental dignity of each and every individual. Today all creeds are also united in their refusal to be misused as political tools or as an excuse to justify violence and extremism, and in their willingness to overcome past prejudices and deepen their mutual understanding.

*Mr. Yáñez-Barnuevo (Spain), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

States have a role to play in supporting interreligious dialogue and cooperation. By upholding the freedoms of thought, expression and religion, Governments help to create an environment of tolerance and understanding. By attaching equal importance to these fundamental freedoms and by acting accordingly, public authorities show that liberty and the respect for religion can and must be reconciled.

Balancing civil liberties is not the only contribution that Governments can make to the harmonious coexistence of faiths. They should also address the underdevelopment and social exclusion that often compound conflicts among faithful of different religions. It is no secret that extremists of all kinds, including religious extremists, thrive where material destitution and hopelessness fuel intolerance and violence.

Such beliefs rest on Brazil's experience as a nation and as a society. Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity lie at the very heart of our national identity. We know by experience that respect for diversity enriches and strengthens us. We know that the peaceful coexistence of populations from all continents, each with its cultural and ethnic background, and of people of different faiths have progressively instilled in our national character a strong inclination for accommodating those different from ourselves and an aversion to all kinds of extremism. Communities of Jewish and Arab descent, for example, have always lived and live today side by side in harmony in our country. This experience reinforces our strong support for the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination and to an independent and sovereign State, geographically coherent and economically viable, living side by side with Israel, within secure and recognized borders.

Other important contributions to a solid culture of peace in Brazil are the historic progress in reducing poverty and social inequality and our sustained efforts to improve basic and secondary education. We are convinced that more prosperous and educated citizens are less prone to intolerance and extremism. President Lula instituted 21 January as the National Day Against Religious Intolerance as a way to further strengthen the existing relationships of mutual respect and understanding among different creeds and their followers in our country.

The key concepts of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and promotion of development and social inclusiveness form the foundation of a world where civilizations, cultures and religions can flourish peacefully side by side and cooperate for the good of all. Let us all renew our commitment to those powerful ideals and translate them into concrete action.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of Tunisia.

**Mr. Mansour** (Tunisia) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express our delegation's sense of pride in participating in this high-level meeting of the General Assembly held under agenda item 45, entitled "Culture of peace", which today deals with the question of interfaith dialogue. I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the Secretary-General of the United Nations for his report (A/63/262) on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace and the important information it contains about various regional and international activities and initiatives in the areas of dialogue among religions and cultures.

I must also express profound appreciation and gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, for his initiative in convening this significant meeting. And I am grateful to the President of the General Assembly for the attention and significance he has accorded this event.

The world over the past two decades has witnessed a drastic and unprecedentedly fast-paced transformation that has created new balances of power, new concepts and new challenges that cannot be ignored. Observing the events that have taken place since the early 1990s, one is stunned by some strange points of view that theorize about conflict, the clash of

civilizations, the end of history, and selectivity in dealing with different cultures. All of this way followed by events that precipitated many violent reactions which escalated and provoked feelings of hatred and bigotry. These sentiments were exploited by extremists on both sides and were used to incite strife, hatred and the rejection of the other and to advocate extremism and the use of religion as a pretext for violence and terrorism. All these developments, in our view, amount to a qualitative setback on the path of human progress.

In addition, the spread of tension and conflict, the inability to find mutual and fair solutions for outstanding international issues, including the question of Palestine, as well as the profoundly unfair imbalance in the economy, the sciences and modern technologies, place international relations in a position of uncertainty and causes great concern and creates mistrust and lack of confidence. This compels us to think about new ways for rapprochement among States, peoples and individuals and requires creating a new code of conduct and behaviour in line with these transformations and challenges.

Tunisia is very attentive to the question of interfaith dialogue. This is based on our belief that world peace can be built only on dialogue, tolerance and understanding and that all countries, civilizations and religions teach tolerance and are more than capable of contributing to the development of mutual human values, which can act as a strong tool in bringing together nations and peoples and in helping them overcome their disputes and difficulties. Achieving this noble objective requires that we remain open to each other, that we avoid prejudging or holding one-dimensional views, eschew intolerance, bigotry and attempts to distort and slander under the pretext of freedom of expression.

Faced with these new challenges, it is important for everyone to join together to sensitize international public opinion and turn it away from the escalating waves of violence and extremism, thus encouraging it to conduct a frank dialogue — one that rejects close-mindedness and the exclusion of others.

Because we believe that the inability of the individual to take advantage of knowledge provides fertile ground for extremism and bigotry, Tunisia began a reform process in the early 1990s in its school curricula and has implemented a number of measures

in family, societal and media reform to emphasize and strengthen the values of tolerance, dialogue and coexistence to build a firm foundation of thinking about behaviour. Among other measures taken, we are proud of the constitutional reform we implemented in 2002, which has strengthened the principles of tolerance and cooperation in our Republic's Constitution.

Alongside the reform measures, under the leadership of President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, Tunisia has added its efforts to those of the international community to strengthen understanding among peoples, cultures and religions and to strengthen the culture of dialogue as the best framework to renounce the heritage of misconceptions, hatred and racism. We have carried out a number of new initiatives and approaches, including the 1995 Carthage Compact for Tolerance, in cooperation with UNESCO, and the creation in 2001 of the Ben Ali Chair for Dialogue among Civilizations and Religions — an academically endowed post designed to provide sufficient intellectual ground to support peace and development in all regions and continents. In December 1972 we also created the Republic's International Prize for Islamic Studies to enrich new interpretive thinking in our religion. Another initiative, created in May 2005, was the Tunisia forum for peace, in cooperation with the General Secretary of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. In June 2005, we established a Centre for Study and Research for Competitive Dialogue among Civilizations and religions, followed by the Declaration of Tunisia for the Alliance of Civilizations in February 2006 at the end of an international seminar that was organized in cooperation with the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Tunisia will continue supporting these initiatives, based on its deep belief in the need to unite the efforts of all in order to consolidate the culture of dialogue, openness and tolerance.

We note with appreciation a growing awareness of the importance of dialogue locally, regionally and internationally; but we also see that such dialogue can be fruitful only if all parties keep it honest, credible and noble. In order for our dialogue to remain balanced and fruitful, we must support and activate international organizations and exert greater efforts to deal with the causes of tension and strife, including the elimination of poverty and marginalization through a new



momentum for the mechanisms of cooperation among States, such as the World Solidarity Fund, established by General Assembly resolution 57/265 in 2002. The 2005 World Summit called for its activation so that it could help in combating poverty, thereby eliminating the growing gap among nations and the deepening sense of frustration and exclusion.

Today we are in great need of overcoming the bipolarity and duality of conflict between East and West, North and South. We must get rid of the misunderstandings that have accumulated among nations and acknowledge the human dimension of all cultures, religions and civilizations. We must acknowledge that the security, stability and prosperity of States is itself the security and prosperity of the entire world. We must deepen the universal aspects of our thinking, behaviour and relations with others, regardless of the specific details of our faiths or cultures so that humankind can remain united in dialogue, cooperation, understanding and solidarity as it confronts the common challenges and risks that face us all.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of China.

**Mr. Zhang Yesui** (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation supports the initiative of the President of the General Assembly to hold a high-level plenary discussion under the agenda item entitled "Culture of peace", in response to the initiative by His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. We are convinced that this debate will help further interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation and enhance mutual understanding and harmonious coexistence among Member States.

Religious and cultural diversity is an asset of human society and an important driving force for social development, cultural exchange and world peace. In today's world, global problems present more pronounced challenges, such as terrorism, climate change, food and the energy and finance crises, which pose grave threats to human development. The fates of all countries are more closely interlinked than ever before.

At the same time, racial and religious discrimination has led to unprecedented collisions and shocks among cultures and civilizations. The international community is faced not only with the

shared responsibility to enhance cooperation in coping with challenges, but also with the daunting task of minimizing differences and seeking common ground. Against this backdrop, it has become all the more important to strengthen interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation and all the more urgent to build a harmonious world.

China stands for the promotion of equality among different religions and cultures on the basis of mutual respect. The various religions and cultures originated and developed at different times in history, but there is, however, no difference as far as their status is concerned. All religions and cultures are the crystallization of human wisdom and have contributed to the progress and development of human society. As such, they deserve equal respect. Different religions and cultures ought, in a spirit of openness and sincerity, to learn from each other's strengths and live in peaceful coexistence.

China advocates respecting differences in order to peacefully address conflicts, which often originate in alienation, discrimination, fear and even hatred caused by differences. The Chinese Government has always opposed extremism and all forms of discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance based on religion, race or any other grounds, as well as the attempt to link terrorism to a specific nation, ethnicity or religion.

We are concerned with the resurgence of extremism, such as Islamophobia and new forms of fascism. We believe that the international community should work towards the long-term resolution of conflicts in regional hotspots, eliminate the estrangement, misunderstanding and disputes among religions and cultures through initiatives based on the principles of mutual respect, mutual benefit, equality and cooperation and the seeking of win-win outcomes and joint development.

China believes that education is a useful means to help young people adopt a correct perception of civilization and the world. Young people are the future of the humankind. Efforts to create a harmonious world must start with the young generation. National Governments should take the primary responsibility and introduce long-term and effective measures to spread the philosophy of a culture of peace, such as tolerance, understanding and respect, while fostering the ability of fend off racial hatred and fight discrimination.

China believes that the media should voluntarily take upon themselves the social responsibility to be the messengers of a culture of peace and promote tolerance, understanding and harmony in society. The media, as the carriers of information should seek the speedy dissemination of information to the public but must also pay attention to the quality of information disseminated. They should transmit healthy and truthful information that upholds the moral standards and conceptions of justice in society. Additionally, the media should refrain from disseminating provocative and insulting comments that trigger confrontation among religions and cultures.

The five-thousand year history of Chinese civilization shows that religion and culture can be positive factors in a society's harmonious development. China is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. In China, 56 ethnic groups treat each other equally. Main religions like Buddhism, Taoism, Islam, and Christianity coexist harmoniously and grow continuously.

The Chinese culture advocates harmony and accord. From ancient sages such as Confucius and Mencius to pioneers of democracy in modern history, ideas such as "harmony", "harmonious but different" and "working together with one accord in time of difficulties" have been among the main elements of their thinking. Throughout the history of its development, Chinese civilization has been imbued with the spirit of harmony, which has, as its essence, mutual recognition, mutual respect, the search for commonalities — while putting aside differences — and coexistence and common growth.

The People's Republic of China's Constitution has established the principles of the freedom of religious belief, the equality of all religions and the separation of church and State. China respects the freedom of religion, pursues the policy of autonomy in handling religious affairs and has promulgated the "Regulations on Religious Affairs", the purpose of which is to maintain religious and social harmony.

China's religious community takes an active part in international cooperation and has hosted a number of international forums, such as the World Buddhist Forum and the International Forum on Taoism. This year, the China Buddhist Association, the Taoist Association and the Islamic Association took an active part in the World Conference on Dialogue co-hosted by

the Kings of Saudi Arabia and Spain. We support this initiative and expect it to continue to evolve in a healthy and in-depth way and to make greater contributions to the facilitation of interfaith and intercultural understanding.

China advocates the building of a harmonious society and world and firmly supports and actively participates in the efforts of the international community to promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation. In 2007, the Third Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Interfaith Dialogue was held in China and adopted the Nanjing Statement on Interfaith Dialogue.

The Chinese Government also participates in a constructive manner in multiple initiatives and mechanisms of the United Nations related to dialogue among civilizations, including the Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations, the Alliance of Civilizations and the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace.

The British philosopher Bertrand Russell said, "Contacts between different civilizations have often in the past proved to be landmarks in human progress". We hope that the relevant initiatives and mechanisms can create synergy by complementing each other so as to form a bridge of communication and cooperation with a view to promoting the common development of human society and helping to build a better, more harmonious world.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor the chairman of the delegation of Canada.

**Mr. McNee** (Canada): On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their initiative in organizing this plenary meeting on dialogue between religions and cultures.

Since its inception, the United Nations has provided a forum to bring the countries and people of the world together. It has promoted constructive dialogue across cultures and faiths, which has contributed to greater mutual understanding. Initiatives such as this discussion demonstrate that the nations of the world recognize the importance of their shared responsibility to promote intercultural dialogue, an objective that Canada is proud to support.

While the world offers many examples of successful multi-ethnic, multi-faith, and multicultural communities that coexist and benefit from their interaction, too often such differences are considered grounds for competition or triggers for armed conflict. We must all work to change such mistaken perceptions. Diversity is a valuable asset and a source of opportunity, not a threat.

Throughout Canada's history, the accommodation of regional, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity has been critical to our overall health as a country. Many of the values that Canadians hold dear — freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law — have evolved through an ongoing dialogue among the cultures and communities that make up our diverse society.

Openness to diversity and intercultural dialogue has strengthened Canadian society and enriched our culture. We have long benefited from the cultural influence of British, French and aboriginal populations, as well as the skills, languages, cultures, religions and other contributions of more than 200 ethno-cultural communities in Canada. This diversity is reflected in and reinforced by the official multiculturalism policy.

Canada fosters pluralism through laws, institutions and policies that promote the equal participation of all people in society. At the same time, we encourage peoples to retain their cultural, linguistic and religious heritage. We do so not just through federal, provincial and municipal Governments, but also through academia, the media, religious groups, community organizations and civil society.

*(spoke in French)*

Of course, the promotion of pluralism and dialogue among religions and cultures must be pursued beyond national boundaries. Moreover, the international community must not limit its efforts to mere dialogue; it must also take concrete steps to promote increased intercultural understanding and respect for people with other cultural and religious backgrounds. That is why such initiatives as the Alliance of Civilizations, which have identified concrete measures concerning young people, the media, education and migration, are so important in combating ignorance, a potential source of cross-cultural misunderstanding. It was to further that objective that Canada also partnered with the Aga Khan Development Network to establish a Global

Centre for Pluralism. The Centre's mission is to promote pluralism as a fundamental value and a basis for peace, stability and human development.

In conclusion, within the framework of this initiative and other programmes, Canada is committed to working together with the international community to enhance intercultural dialogue and understanding throughout the world.

**The Acting President** *(spoke in Spanish)*: I now call on the representative of Cuba.

**Mr. Domínguez Martínez** (Cuba) *(spoke in Spanish)*: Permit me at the outset to express my appreciation for the holding of this important meeting promoted by His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia, which is a new step forward in the promotion of a culture of peace.

The principal goals set out in the Charter of the Organization are "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and to create a democratic and equitable international order based on respect for the dignity of all human beings on an equal basis. Those were the founding objectives of the Organization to which we belong. Its purposes are the maintenance of international peace and security on the basis of the principles of the sovereign equality of all its Members, the peaceful settlement of international disputes, refraining from the threat or use of force and non-interference in the internal affairs of States. We were promised that all peoples would achieve economic and social progress.

We are witnessing an extremely grave global financial, energy and food crisis, which, together with environmental degradation and the effects of climate change, inter alia, reflect a sad economic and social panorama that endangers the human species, particularly in developing countries. The lives of millions of human beings living on the planet are also threatened by the unilateralism of the world's only super-Power, which in recent years has based its actions on the so-called doctrine of the clash of civilizations, demonizing venerable cultures and religions.

The Alliance of Civilizations is the only way to address unilateralism and neo-liberal globalization, which seek to keep the countries of the South underdeveloped and to homogenize and dominate their cultures. Cuba reaffirms the ideals of our national hero,

José Martí, who, in the nineteenth century, proclaimed the need to achieve an equitable world. On the basis of that premise, we must work together to find joint responses to the challenges of the modern world and to achieve a culture of peace.

Cuba reaffirms its support for multilateralism and multilaterally agreed solutions, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and international law, as the only way to address international problems. Only thus will there be peace and development for all. We reaffirm the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace and the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and its Programme of Action, and we support UNESCO's programmes and practical initiatives in that regard. We believe that the activities planned to commemorate the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010 will also contribute to the promotion of a culture of peace.

Likewise, Cuba thanks the Government of Philippines for offering to host the Special Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development, to be held in Manila from 26 to 28 May 2009. We also highlight the Declaration and Programme of Action adopted within the framework of the NAM Ministerial Meeting on Human Rights and Cultural Diversity, held in September 2007 in Iran.

Every doctrine that is based on racial or cultural superiority must be strongly rejected. In recent years, a number of countries have identified certain cultures and religions with terrorism and violence. Those views must not be tolerated. We must reject any action involving racial harm, discrimination, stereotyping and racial profiling, or the defamation of religions against human dignity, equality and justice.

Cuba reiterates that the diversity of political, social, cultural and religious systems must be respected in order to contribute to the establishment of a peaceful and prosperous world, a just and equitable world order and an environment conducive to the sharing of human experience.

We believe that the study of diverse cultures and civilizations in educational curriculums, including the teaching of the languages, histories and sociopolitical philosophies of various civilizations, as well as the sharing of knowledge and information, contribute to the promotion of a culture of peace. We also highlight the role of the media in spreading human values as

well as the need to promote responsibility and ethical conduct on the part of the media in order to contribute to mutual respect among diverse civilizations. Cuba is convinced that together we can share the belief that a better world is possible.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of the Republic of the Sudan.

**Mr. Mohamad** (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to express to the Assembly our deep appreciation for the honourable initiative to hold this high-level meeting to encourage interfaith and intercultural dialogue. By the same token, we express our appreciation and gratitude to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who called for this meeting as part of His Majesty's inspiring initiative to foster dialogue among religions and cultures in order to create a world where understanding and a climate of coexistence and mutual acceptance are the norm. This was demonstrated earlier through his sponsorship of the Mecca Conference and the Madrid Conference held last June. These conferences made contributions that have proved to provide a great impetus towards improved interfaith and interreligious dialogue, which in turn can be activated through programmes of action and priorities, translating the recommendations of those conferences into living reality.

This high-level meeting is the culmination of numerous initiatives calling for supportive dialogue among civilizations in lieu of the extremist views that favour the clash of civilizations and the end of history. The latter visions are exclusive and rigidly unilateral. They belittle the perspectives and choices of others and impose narrow models on everyone else.

Interfaith and interreligious dialogue is a true substitute for ethnic, cultural and civilizational superiority. It constitutes a positive movement forward for the sake of humanity. The United Nations, in accordance with its Charter, calls for joint efforts to foster friendly relations, create an ideal human society, deepen dialogue and use such dialogue as a means of contact among peoples and as an opportunity to exchange experience, benefits and learning.

At the end of 1994, the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made a declaration for tolerance and the spread of the culture of peace. That

was on the eve of the United Nations Year for Tolerance (1995), which had been proclaimed by the General Assembly in resolution 48/126. The United Nations continued its efforts along those lines through the year 2001, which had been declared the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations (resolution 53/22), in keeping with its ongoing belief in the important role of dialogue in bringing together different cultures and religions and building on common denominators, with a view to achieving peaceful coexistence and cooperation among nations and peoples.

The United Nations is called upon to redouble its efforts to strengthen and raise the level of interfaith and interreligious dialogue by supporting the outcomes and findings of the numerous initiatives and conferences in this field. In this regard, we should continue our concerted efforts to rein in radical extreme practices and trends that insult prophets, religions and religious symbols. We should decisively condemn such practices and trends, because they fan the flames of enmity among peoples and religions, deepen the divide and lead to an angry climate that undermines efforts aimed at encouraging interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

We see the need to respect cultural and civilizational diversity. Accordingly, we should emphasize respect for the rights of communities and immigrants to decent living conditions, particularly with the emergence of radical trends in some Western States calling for their exclusion and marginalization, thereby depriving them of their political, cultural and socio-economic rights. Such deprivation is a form of racism and racial discrimination and an expression of attitudes of ethnic and cultural superiority. All of these phenomena are negative, dangerous, impede dialogue and should be dealt with decisively; indeed, we should condemn them in order to create a climate conducive to tolerance and understanding.

The Sudan will continue to support initiatives for dialogue among religions and cultures, as well as initiatives launched in this area in order to achieve a world characterized by amity, peace and coexistence. This attitude forms part of our country's contribution, given its rich cultural diversity and geographic location, and constitutes part of our social and cultural fabric in which real human action and contact can take place.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Indonesia.

**Mr. Natalegawa** (Indonesia): My delegation wishes to thank the Secretary-General for the reports before us entitled "Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace" (A/63/262) and "International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001–2010" (A/63/127). Indonesia is also deeply appreciative of the work of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and other institutions of the United Nations system, as well as the ongoing efforts of the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and the Alliance of Civilizations to promote a culture of peace.

Indonesia attaches great importance to the initiatives of Member States to promote respect for diversity, freedom, justice, tolerance and cooperation, as these principles are all important building blocks for the maintenance of international peace and security. Indonesia appreciates the importance of the process resulting from the World Conference on Dialogue which was held last July in Madrid under the patronage of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and King Juan Carlos I of Spain.

Efforts to promote a culture of peace represent an important part of the interaction among all cultures and civilizations. In our view, interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation are particularly significant when considered against the backdrop of our volatile world today. As we have seen, when ethnic and religious prejudices are compounded by economic, political or other rivalries, the resulting situation can be explosive. We believe that faith-related conflicts are more likely to occur when the extremism of a few triumphs over the moderation of the overwhelming majority.

Moderation is an inherent component of the Indonesian way of life, developed over the years as a response to the pluralism of the peoples of our archipelago. We have a culture that encourages broad consultation. We have had centuries of practice in the art of dialogue and fostering tolerance. This approach is our way of coping with the immense variety of our ethnic traditions.

We also see tolerance as an imperative in human and social development. In fact, for us, development is not purely an economic process. It is not enough simply to attempt to lift people out of their poverty. We must also redeem them from narrow-mindedness, prejudice and intolerance. That means that there can be no true development without a broad educational process that enables all persons to see themselves not only in terms of their own religion, but in terms of the faiths of others. And thus we managed to weave, from the many strands of our ethnic cultures and traditions, the single fabric of our nationhood. That is also how we deal with the fact that, since ancient times, many religions have found a home on Indonesian soil. Our attainment of unity in spite of our diversity is celebrated in our national motto: “Bhinneka tunggal ika”. We are diverse and yet we are one.

Beyond our national boundaries, we believe that dialogue among peoples, cultures, faiths and civilizations is essential to the growth of a global culture of peace. It is with this philosophy in mind that Indonesia has launched and participates in various kinds of dialogue among faiths, cultures and civilizations. In 2004, we initiated the Asia-Pacific Regional Dialogue on Interfaith Cooperation and, in 2005, we organized the Asia-Europe Interfaith Dialogue. Both dialogues have now become major annual events. We have also launched bilateral interfaith initiatives with countries of different cultures such as Australia, New Zealand, the Vatican, Canada, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

In recognition of the role of the mass media in combating ignorance and prejudice among faiths, cultures and civilizations, we have also initiated a series of global inter-media dialogues, with Norway as our co-sponsor, to sensitize the mass media to become an effective instrument for the promotion of mutual understanding and appreciation among the world's different faiths and cultures.

Furthermore, in the belief that interfaith dialogue is too important to be left to the good work of Governments, we encourage the role that nongovernmental actors can play in the quest for harmony. In that light, the Government of Indonesia has supported the initiatives of various civil society groups, including the International Conference of Islamic Scholars, which is sponsored by Nandlatul Ulama, the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia, and the World Peace Forum, which is hosted by

Muhammadiyah, the second largest Muslim organization in the country. We are hopeful that all those initiatives will not only complement but also strengthen other activities addressing the same subject. Indeed, we hope they become an important part of the global web of cooperation aimed at promoting faith-based peace and harmony.

It is important to recognize, however, that conference room dialogue is not the only forum for the exchange of views or for finding a common platform. There are daily practices at the grassroots level that are worth appreciating and encouraging. In our respective societies, we may witness people of different faiths and religions conducting dialogues by helping each other in building their houses of worship or common schools. Similarly, there is the dialogue of teaching, when children at school are exposed to other faiths and cultures. In these activities, we identify a dialogue of action, a dialogue of life and a dialogue of teaching.

In the globalized and interdependent world of today, economic, social and cultural issues could contribute significantly to peace and security. Ensuring a fair economy, social justice and harmonious cultural relationships is a significant part of that. Bridges among peoples and groups must be encouraged and constructed.

It is in this context that our delegation supports the draft resolution introduced by Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Philippines, entitled “Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace” (A/63/L.24/Rev.1). We look forward to the adoption of this draft resolution by consensus.

Our delegation also supports the draft resolution to be introduced by the representative of Bangladesh, entitled “International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010” (A/63/L.23). We also look forward to its adoption by consensus.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of Norway.

**Mr. Wetland** (Norway): I am heartened to speak after my good friend, the Ambassador from Indonesia, a country with which Norway is conducting an inter-media dialogue and, in practical terms, is building bridges between countries, religions, Islam and

Christianity. And we will continue to do that in both our regions of the world, reaching across the possible gap between us.

Norway believes that the United Nations is built on the principle that it is dialogue and mutual respect that must govern relations between the peoples of the United Nations. We are here to find shared interests, to defend values, to bridge our differences and to settle them peacefully. We are also the guardians of the human rights and the fundamental freedoms, State rights, majority rights and, not least, minority rights, which we have adopted in the course of 63 years. We are an organization where, as John F. Kennedy said, the strong shall be just and the weak secure.

The laudable initiative of Saudi Arabia, which has given us the opportunity to discuss dialogue between religions and culture for two days in this Assembly, comes at a timely moment in history. Globalization, migration and information technology have made it clear to us that we have become very much closer to people and cultures that were perceived as being far away from our daily lives only decades ago. We may not yet have fully learnt to rejoice in the richness of diversity or to learn with an open mind from the best of others. This is also the case in my own country, which is relatively new to the broad canvas of cultural and religious diversity and where we are learning every day and working politically to integrate immigrants and refugees in a manner that is respectful of their identity and experience. We aim to become a fully inclusive society, where everybody feels welcome and where everybody may live to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Although we believe that religious faith is an issue that belongs to the individual and that all persons have the inherent right to change religious faith and that they should be allowed to practice their religion, or not to practice religion, without fear, we also believe that religious communities have important roles to play in furthering dialogue and respect among religions and cultures. When it comes to the practical steps needed to improve dialogue, we all need to start at home.

If future generations are to be more successful in living together and mutually respecting each other, we must teach them respect from childhood. We need to look at what we teach them in primary school about other peoples, cultures and religions, and we need to

look at what we do not teach them. School curricula are essential.

As we prepare to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, we must be guided in our dialogue by the fundamental freedoms enshrined in that Declaration. We hold the firm view that freedom of religion cannot be achieved without freedom of speech. And freedom of speech is a prerequisite for any valuable dialogue. A dialogue is not a dialogue but a shared monologue, if it does not encourage the expression of different views without fear.

In my country, we have established a Council for Religion and Life Stance Communities, which meets with the Government to exchange views. In the framework of the Council, participants inform each other of issues of mutual interest, including how opinions and public expressions are perceived among people with different cultural backgrounds or religious affiliations. We can have freedom of expression while, in parallel, exercising caution so that we do not inadvertently or unnecessarily denigrate or disrespect what others hold dear. This attitude is taught in all cultures and practiced here in the United Nations every day. And it has nothing to do with censorship or legal restriction, only with human consideration and respect.

I conclude today with an example of that wisdom that I just mentioned and which I believe is universal. My example is taken from *Hávamál*, the 1,000-year-old Norse-Icelandic educational poem, which reads:

“Wise is he not who is never silent,  
Mouthing meaningless words:  
A glib tongue that goes on chattering  
Sings to its own harm.”

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of Portugal.

**Mr. Salgueiro** (Portugal): Portugal aligns itself with the statement made yesterday by Mr. Alain Juppé on behalf of the European Union. I would like to start my statement by thanking the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia, for his noble efforts to promote dialogue among religions and cultures.

Much has already been said about interreligious and intercultural dialogue, but I would like to take this opportunity to reaffirm the importance of interreligious

and intercultural dialogue as crucial dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and of the culture of peace.

Allow me to underline that we value this occasion to learn more about regional or national initiatives or best practices to encourage dialogue and mutual understanding. These initiatives are mutually reinforcing and interrelated, and my country, Portugal, values all efforts to foster a better understanding among peoples. It is indeed the absence of understanding that promotes intolerance, bigotry and extremism.

At the national level, we should not undervalue the role of education. Indeed, Portugal is fully convinced of the primary importance of education in promoting a culture of peace. It is by investing our efforts in the youngest members of our society, as well as in education through life that we can best mainstream the values of peace, tolerance and the protection and promotion of human rights for present and future generations.

Portugal is in full agreement that the promotion of dialogue and understanding among cultures is essential to building a more peaceful world. This goal can be achieved if human rights and fundamental freedoms are fully protected and promoted. All human rights are universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated, as stated in the 1993 Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action. Paragraph 5 of that Declaration states:

“While the significance of national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds must be borne in mind, it is the duty of States, regardless of their political, economic and cultural systems, to promote and protect all human rights and fundamental freedoms.”

*Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon), Vice-President, took the Chair.*

Portugal is part of the group of friends of the Alliance of Civilizations, initiated by the Governments of Spain and Turkey and now under the auspices of the United Nations, as mentioned yesterday by Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon. We firmly believe that the Alliance of Civilizations can play a central role in reinforcing dialogue at the global level. Indeed, more than ever before, intercultural understanding is a

complex task but also an essential element of both domestic and international harmony. With its universal membership, in terms of regional, cultural, linguistic and religious communities, the Alliance is a valuable tool that we must fully explore.

By embracing diversity as a means of progress and building upon universal human rights, we can work towards an effective culture of peace and provide a better world for coming generations.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chair of the delegation of the Gambia.

**Mrs. Waffa-Ogoo (Gambia)**: Please allow me to extend words of gratitude and commendation to King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, for his vision and foresight in initiating this high-level meeting. Also, the United Nations sponsorship and promotion of the culture of peace and the dialogue among civilizations has been and remains a major milestone in the history of human culture.

Sixty years ago, the community of nations unanimously adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which remains a beacon of hope for human dignity and equality and the solid basis for dialogue across cultures and civilizations.

As defined by the United Nations, the culture of peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations.

In terms of the preservation of human dignity and the maintenance of international peace and security, the last century was probably the bloodiest, given the number and ferocity of conflicts which caused untold suffering. Most of those conflicts have ended. However, in certain hotspots, insecurity persists.

Although we all harboured high hopes and great expectations of the current millennium, conflicts, whether political, religious or of another nature, persist. Unfortunately, these conflicts, which are due mainly to greed and avarice and sometimes to extremism, are contrary to the principles of the Declaration and the Charter and the teachings of the great religions.



Whereas sustainable economic and social development, environmental sustainability, poverty eradication and sustainable food security are all vital ingredients for the maintenance of peace and security and peaceful coexistence among peoples, the reality is other than that. Rapid population growth, rural/urban migration leading to massive urbanization, the debt burden, climate change, food insecurity and the global financial crisis have rendered the bulk of the world's population poorer and more vulnerable. A large percentage of these, no doubt, are made up of jobless youth who are, for the most part, restless for change. We all know that idle hands are the devil's workshop.

It is a travesty that, in spite of successes in all areas of human endeavour, including science, technology and medicine, and in spite of the abundance of wealth, food and natural resources in some parts of our planet, more than half of the world's population still wallows in abject poverty and is plagued by disease, hunger and malnutrition. Let us stand together to eradicate these injustices, the root causes of conflict and violence.

Cultivating a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations must be underpinned by comprehensive educational, social and civic actions. World leaders must commit to redirect resources from military expenditures to investing in programmes that bring about development and human security. Of recent, developing countries watched in amazement while the developed countries were dishing out trillions of United States dollars to bail out financial institutions, whereas their commitments to increase official development assistance to the developing countries remain to a large extent unfulfilled.

More than ever before, there is a need to build bridges of understanding, tolerance and solidarity across civilizations, cultures and peoples. We must be resolute in the pursuit of interfaith dialogue and cooperation by seeking to increase knowledge and understanding of the world's religions. We need to remind ourselves that three of those religions, Islam, Judaism and Christianity, whose adherents are often referred to as the people of the Book, are all rooted in the Abrahamic faith. As such, the focus should be on the values shared, rather than on those things that tend to divide. Consequently, the media are encouraged to play an enabling role through the dissemination of helpful information to engender understanding, goodwill and solidarity.

In the Gambia, we cherish and are proud of the fact that, through the legacy of our forefathers, we enjoy religious tolerance and peaceful coexistence between the minority Christian and the majority Muslim populations. We celebrate each other's feast days and our religious leaders also exchange visits on those days. Every year, at the beginning of the New Year, the President of the Republic invites religious leaders from all faiths and creeds to dialogue with him at the State House. Insh'allah, the Gambia will continue to strive to sustain its harmonious relationships between Christians, Muslims and peoples of other faiths.

Lastly, but by no means least, is the recognition of the power of education to bring about a change of mindset to one that embraces peace and dialogue, through the implementation of values education programmes in all schools across the globe. Those courses should focus on the issues of freedom, protection of the common good, honesty, integrity, respect, understanding, tolerance and inclusion. That kind of education allows one to act according to one's own thoughts.

To conclude, my humble plea is to urge all of the nations of the world to act on the proposal of former President Khatami of Iran, namely, to seek to transform dialogue among civilizations from a doctrine into a programme of action. But above all, we should all strive to internalize the profound words from the Bible: love your neighbour as yourself.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of the Russian Federation.

**Mr. Churkin** (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are very grateful to those who initiated this meeting, first and foremost, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, for the opportunity to discuss one of the most urgent issues of the world today — the role of religion in maintaining global and regional stability and in building an equitable and just world.

In the era of globalization, cooperation between different countries and peoples has become more intense and complicated than ever before. Various non-governmental structures, including religious communities, have become increasingly involved in that process. The main religions have doctrines based on values that are common to humankind as a whole and

have a considerable potential for peace; they are, therefore, becoming more instrumental in preventing a clash between civilizations.

I believe those doctrines also play a decisive role, to a large extent, in our ability to counter extremism, racism and xenophobia and resolve nascent conflicts, as they are based on a common denominator of the values instilled by all of the great religions. Teaching mutual respect and tolerance through religious and secular education programmes can contribute to such actions, in partnership with other sectors of society including the governmental sector.

On the other hand, it is essential to effectively use the potential of the United Nations in strengthening peace between religions as a condition for achieving the main goals of the Organization — global security, development and the promotion of human rights.

One of the essential goals is to overcome various forms of extremism. The growth in extremism aggravates current problems as well as old ones inherited from the colonial era, including the economic divide between the North and the South, grave violations of human rights, including some committed in the context of the fight against terrorism, certain activities by multinational corporations, as well as religious defamation. The negative consequences of globalization also place the national and cultural identities of nations and traditional ethical principles in jeopardy.

The High-Level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace, which took place at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly, showed how important it is to maintain cooperation between States, religions and civil society. That positive experience should be developed using the United Nations platform. In that connection we attach great importance to an event planned for 2010, namely, the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, and support involving religious leaders in its various events.

Russia views with great interest the issue of interfaith and intercultural dialogue. We are a multi-confessional country and we have never had religious wars. Russia therefore has a unique experience, stretching back a thousand years, of peaceful and fruitful cooperation between different religions.

Russia takes an active part in a number of multilateral processes to strengthen intercultural cooperation, including in the framework of the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and the Alliance of Civilizations. We also have observer status in the Organization of the Islamic Conference. We also strive to make our own contribution. There is a long list of Russian international initiatives, which include the World Summit of Religious Leaders, the World Public Forum Dialogue of Civilizations, the Strategic Vision Group meeting on Russia and the Islamic world and the Interreligious Council of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The Russian religious community has been cooperating with the United Nations through useful contacts that took place in the course of visits to Russia by the United Nations Secretary-General and the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and by taking part in the activities of the Committee of Religious non-governmental organizations at the United Nations.

In the context of globalization, the role of the religious factor in global politics makes it necessary to suit approaches to current global problems based on the common values of the main religions. The Russian Federation has suggested establishing a consultative council of religions under the auspices of the United Nations. That council could be a forum for an exchange of views between the representatives of different faiths on how to overcome modern challenges, cope with threats and achieve the goals of the Organization. We think that the establishment of such a council would make it possible to promote peaceful cooperation between different religions and would contribute to democratizing international relations.

That idea was a follow-up to the recommendations of the World Summit of Religious Leaders, held in Moscow in 2006. There was a consensus on the need to have a more systematic partnership of religious leaders and with the United Nations.

Yesterday, on 12 November, representatives of the major global religions again met in Moscow and, following the decisions of the Summit, they prepared a package of practical proposals on strengthening cooperation between religious organizations, the

United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization.

Prior to that, between 27 and 29 October, another meeting of the group, Russia and the Islamic world, took place in Saudi Arabia. In the course of this meeting, support was expressed for the initiative of establishing a consultative council.

In order to achieve a stable world, we need mutual understanding, respect for diversity of cultures, traditions and the religious traditions of nations, as well as collective, coordinated efforts and actions involving all stakeholders and participants of the international community. This type of constructive approach is based on the spirit of the United Nations. The United Nations Charter calls for the demonstration of tolerance and living together in harmony.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of the Republic of Senegal.

**Mr. Badji** (Senegal) (*spoke in French*): The delegation of Senegal would like to thank the President for having organized this meeting at the sixty-third session of the General Assembly on the theme of the culture of peace through the dialogue among religions. This is a subject of central importance for the whole of humanity, which, today, is threatened by increasingly serious and underhanded threats.

On behalf of the head of State, His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, the Government and the people of Senegal, I would like to pay sincere tribute to the custodian of the two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, who, by taking the initiative to organize this meeting, has shown that with responsible and enlightened leadership, one can mobilize people and Governments towards finding responses to our common concerns.

This tribute is also addressed to His Majesty Juan Carlos I, King of Spain. In addition to being a co-founder of the initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations, together with Turkey, his country hosted the World Conference on Dialogue from 16 to 18 July 2008. One of the recommendations resulting from that Conference, quite appropriately, was to hold this high-level meeting in this temple of cooperation, compromise, convergence and consensus.

The choice of the Kingdom of Spain to host the World Conference on Dialogue was certainly not

coincidental. Given its geographical placement and its history, that great country is a land of encounter, a land of intermingling and intermarrying, and serves as crossroads for peoples, nations, cultures and civilizations, including the Greco-Roman, European, African, Arab, Judeo-Christian and Islamic.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome all of the initiatives undertaken at national and international levels aimed at establishing bridges between peoples and nations. I would also like to reaffirm the unshakeable attachment of Senegal, as well as our unfailing commitment, to constructively contribute to the dialogue of civilizations, cultures and religions.

At a time when controversial declarations, words of violence and hate, as well as deliberately shocking acts, which nourish destructive passions, are proliferating it is more necessary than ever before to move beyond a superficial commitment and establish a genuine dialogue among peoples.

This communion of minds and hearts will not be possible, however, if we do not set aside all preconceived ideas of superiority of one civilization over another. Concurrently, we also need to overcome our fear of the other and accept to compare our experiences and move away from sectarian and communitarian approaches that isolate us in a pattern of exclusion and discrimination.

We must also come to hold that no civilization among those that have survived the upheavals of history can boast that it has not been influenced by other peoples or cultures which have breathed their life into it and have created a living dynamism that has been indispensable to its development.

Quite clearly, civilizations have developed and been enriched by dialogue and by exchanges with others, as is taught by the recent history of humanity, which has seen the emergence of great nations that have been born of the meeting between communities and have crossed borders and overcome numerous obstacles to pull together the best that they have.

Therefore, as was passionately advocated by our late President and poet Léopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal, we must live our particularism to the limit to find the dawn of the universal. In other words, it is by having a strong sense of our own values and by opening ourselves up to others that we will be able to

construct the civilization of the universal that will be a meeting place of giving and receiving. Once again, I have paraphrased here the call of Negritude and the civilization of the universal.

Today, there is unanimity on the necessity of a dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions. However, we recognize that the modalities of this dialogue must be clearly defined for difficulties remain on reconciling convictions and visions of the world, which are diverse and varied. At the same time, the boldness of the task should not be an insurmountable obstacle for us, because our destiny is so noble and our will so firm that, by combining our efforts together, we will surely succeed.

In this respect, we must admit that dialogue among peoples cannot be based on the premise of a previous agreement or the acceptance of a single benchmark for civilization. On the contrary, its main premise must be mutual respect as the alternative to confrontation and antagonism and must remove the obstacles born of misunderstandings and poorly founded prejudices.

In this context, the media also have a crucial role to play. It is up to them to pay greater attention to what unites us, rather than to what divides us, and avoid falling into the trap of facile criticism. The media must attempt to reconcile the generally accepted demand of freedom of expression with the duty to respect beliefs and the religions of others.

Our attachment to freedom of expression must never be interpreted as accepting a presumed right to defamation of religions and the propagation of hate among communities. Freedom of expression must have responsibility as its corollary.

Dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions must be supported by a vigorous affirmation of our attachment to humanist values, such as equality, fairness and justice, in order to establish a climate of trust among peoples on the basis of a knowledge of one another and an enriching exchange of experience at all levels. Such an endeavour can succeed only with the active participation of all sectors of society, particularly young people, who truly are the breeding ground for new ideas that will lay the groundwork for a new approach to the problems besetting us.

Educating young people about tolerance will enable us not only to dispel the darkness of ignorance,

but also, and in particular, to check the ambitions of those who, in the name of so-called religious conviction, scorn the sacredness of human life. That is why my delegation is calling for the integration of curriculums based on the dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace into the educational programmes of all countries to help young people better accept differences and respect those with convictions other than their own.

I wish to conclude by reaffirming the support of Senegal and its President, His Excellency Mr. Abdoulaye Wade, current Chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, for the Madrid process and the appeal launched by King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia for the establishment of a steering committee and a special fund to ensure its autonomy and permanence.

**The Acting President** (*spoke in French*): In accordance with General Assembly resolution 3369 (XXX) of 10 October 1975, I now call on His Excellency Mr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary-General of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

**Mr. Ihsanoglu** (Organization of the Islamic Conference): It is a distinct honour for me to participate in this high-level meeting of the General Assembly proposed by the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. I would like to thank His Excellency Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the General Assembly, for convening this important meeting under the agenda item "Culture of peace".

I would like at the outset to thank His Majesty the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, for this very important initiative to discuss a matter of great relevance that portends potential challenges to world peace and security if left unaddressed.

Over the past two decades, the focus of world politics has shifted from political and ideological conflicts between the world's super-Powers to the so-called clash of cultures and religions. It is in this atmosphere of disquieting uncertainty that we wholeheartedly welcome the timely and wise Saudi initiative, which we regard as an affluent tributary to the global efforts currently being made to restore peace, harmony and congeniality. By the same token, we endorse this initiative and its related mechanism, which, we believe, will immediately meet with the acceptance of all those who are keen to champion the

prevalence of peaceful coexistence and cordial relations among the adherents of all religions of the world.

The primary objective of this initiative is not to preach theological unity, but rather to exchange knowledge and raise awareness about the shared attributes of all religions and to correct misconceptions in a quest to bring about peace, security and stability throughout the world. It also calls for a focus on the commonalities among faiths and the promotion of global ethics. Its aim is not to make religions similar or identical, but to acknowledge differences as serving the needs of peoples of differing beliefs.

This initiative exhorts the international community to focus on the common denominators of religions, namely, deep faith in God, lofty principles and moral and noble values. It seeks to vanquish hatred through love, bigotry through tolerance and vice and evil through virtue.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), in its quest to safeguard the spirit of dialogue among cultures, proposed the initiative of a dialogue among civilizations in 1998 as a response to the theory of the clash of civilizations. The idea was endorsed by the General Assembly, which set it in motion in 2001, resulting in a profound impact on global peace and security.

To date, the failure of the dialogue can be attributed to a lack of political will on the part of stakeholders. We have had many meetings and declarations, without any real implementation of our decisions. Likewise, we have not succeeded in reaching out to the grassroots of society in order to convey to them a message of tolerance, compassion and peaceful coexistence.

The well-known theory of the clash of civilizations and its self-fulfilling prophecy seem to have been legitimized. The powerful tools of the media have been mobilized to create a conceptual link between Islam and terror. Phrases such as “Muslim terrorists” and “Muslim terror” have become commonplace. Such portrayals, frequently propagated by the media, and misperceptions about Islam and Muslims have become the most persistent and virulent sources of the phenomenon of Islamophobia, resulting in prejudicial practices and incitement against Muslims without any distinction. As a result, Islam, which is an Abrahamic religion whose name means “peace”, is

frequently associated with violence. That state of affairs does not bode well for concord and stability in international relations. It requires that immediate and concrete measures be taken in earnest to stem those unfounded claims and tendencies.

At this juncture, I would like to stress that tolerance was and still is the benchmark of Islam. Tolerance is born of the very nature of that global faith. Islam is not an exclusive or novel religion, but a part of the entire history of humankind. It continues and confirms previous scriptures. It has been tested through 1,400 years and has proved to be a religion of peace, pluralism and acknowledgement of the other.

We in the OIC believe that all religions have common core values and objectives. Over the past four decades, the OIC, with its 57 member countries, has worked to disseminate the imperative of the notion of dialogue among various cultures and civilizations. On the basis of that premise, we believe that this initiative is more important than all previous initiatives of its kind.

The OIC and its specialized agencies are working relentlessly to disseminate tolerance, mercy, compassion and concord among Muslim populations throughout the world. In so doing, we are drawing on the ethical and moral resources embedded in the provisions of the OIC Charter and the OIC 10-year Programme of Action, which was endorsed by the third extraordinary session of the Islamic Summit Conference held under the initiative of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia in 2005. The Programme calls on member States to spread correct ideas about Islam as a religion of moderation and tolerance. It also condemns extremism in all its forms and manifestations, while emphasizing intercivilizational dialogue and interreligious dialogue. It also underlines the common values and denominators of religions.

As the sole official intergovernmental organization representing the Muslim world, the OIC firmly believes that the diversity of cultures and religions is an acknowledged and essential part of the world in which we live. That fact should be considered a valuable foundation on which to build a more just and harmonious world.

We believe that it is incumbent upon us of all to do our utmost to educate ordinary people to conceive of culture and civilization as a universal human

heritage to which all people have contributed and which all people should endeavour to share and strengthen. That concept is most relevant to our time, and its relevance is a condition for a worthwhile

interfaith dialogue and interrelationship leading to greater understanding, concord and harmony among all nations and ushering in an era of durable peace.

*The meeting rose at 1.25 p.m.*