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Official Records

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Mbuende (Namibia), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 6.05 p.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 Acting President: I give the floor to the representative of Ecuador.

Mr. Morejón (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a great honour to address the Assembly on behalf of the people and the Government of Ecuador, a country that is convinced that dialogue, equality under the law for all peoples, mutual respect, self-determination, cooperation and peaceful coexistence are the fundamental principles which should guide relations among States. Ecuador supports the pacific settlement of international disputes and conflicts and emphatically rejects the threat or use of force as a mechanism to resolve them. We therefore condemn interference in the internal affairs of States, as well as any form of intervention. Loyal to those principles, my country promotes peace and universal disarmament and condemns the development and use of weapons of mass destruction.

As a founding Member of the United Nations, Ecuador has enshrined in its legal structure the standards set out in the Charter, as well as the principles derived from the Constitution of UNESCO and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. But we have gone further. In our new political constitution, recently approved by a vast majority in a public referendum, Ecuador proclaims itself a State of law, in which all individuals, groups, associations, educational communities, enterprises and institutions enjoy in their daily activity a firm commitment based on respect for life, rejection of violence, understanding, environmental preservation and solidarity as essential elements for attaining social inclusion and equality. Furthermore, the new constitution of Ecuador condemns the imposition of bases or installations with military purposes by one State on the territory of another, since we have declared our country to be a territory of peace.

Additionally, my country has established tolerance and multiculturalism as basic principles, respecting all types of religion and worship, including the enormous spiritual richness of our indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian peoples. As President Rafael Correa Delgado, an economist by training, stated during the commemoration of the tenth anniversary of the signing of Peace Accord with our brotherly country Peru, "we have to build a profound sustainable peace on the basis of development and justice". That is precisely what we are doing in Ecuador; we are building peace each and every day with commitment and effort and based on social justice, equality, dignity and respect. We are

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committed to building a supportive human society that fosters regional integration.

To that end and convinced that peace brings progress, our current Administration, since taking office, has actively participated with its Peruvian counterpart in implementing innumerable projects in the area of the southern Ecuadorian border, dealing with many different issues, including transportation, trade, mutual trust measures, irrigation channels, tourist plans, highways and country roads, migration mechanisms, educational and cultural exchange programmes, hydroelectric stations, environmental measures, a bi-national park for peace, among other things, involving a joint investment of \$2 billion for executing projects. Those projects, as our President has said, evince our political will to change the development pattern. Today we are trying to strengthen the border and move towards a human security concept.

We in Ecuador firmly believe that the human being must be considered the central concern of the international order and that strict respect for human, civil, political, economic, social, cultural and collective rights must form the core of foreign policy, based on the premise that human rights are universal, interdependent and indivisible. The application of those principles must be guided by the principles of universality, impartiality, objectivity and non-selectivity, with the recognition that constructive dialogue and cooperation is necessary in order to foster the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.

The same view applies with regard to the implementation of Plan Ecuador in area of the border zone with Colombia. Its purpose is to conceive human security as a result of peace and development. That plan is based on three fundamental axes: first, strengthening security and the culture of peace, centred on the human being and based upon the satisfaction of their needs and the achievement of their full potential in terms of capabilities and freedoms. Secondly, it fosters the maintenance of equitable international relations in solidarity with others; and thirdly, it affirms a defense policy based on the protection of populations and natural resources, national heritage and effective control of one's territory.

Owing to the impact of the internal Colombian conflict on Ecuadorian society, Plan Ecuador is focused on multidimensional and multi-sector prevention efforts aimed at solving the grave problems resulting from poverty, exclusion and violence. Its implementation is based on achieving national social and economic development objectives, strict compliance with international agreements in the field of human rights, conservation and the sustainable exploitation of natural resources and the fight against all kinds of illegal activities affecting human security.

We propose to that effect the strengthening of the economy of the border provinces, improvement in the quality of life of the people, increasing the presence and the coordination of our State institutions and strengthening the management capacity of Government and local social organizations. That is the only way to respond efficiently and in a timely manner to the increased number of social problems and those resulting from the displacement of groups of people by the internal conflict in Colombia to strengthen humanitarian aid, minimize the environmental impact of production activities and to keep the population from getting involved in illegal activities.

Plan Ecuador is a starting point that sets the political agenda of the Government regarding the northern border. That instrument has been enriched with the help and participation of the main local actors.

The refugee issue in the northern border area is a national priority for my country as we seek to build our culture of peace. In order to foster comprehensive economic and social development and build a zone of peace, as conceived by Plan Ecuador, State policies regarding refugees must guarantee their protection and at the same time provide a lasting solution for those hundreds of thousands of Colombians who need international protection.

Ecuador has implemented key strategies to fulfil such high humanitarian objectives and they deserve special mention. Those strategies allow the active inclusion of people in need of international protection into Ecuadorian society, making Ecuador the country with the largest number of refugees in the western hemisphere.

Finally, and despite the enormous investment in human and economic resources for refugees, which has gone beyond the country's possibilities, Ecuador has renewed its commitment to the issue of refugees, the

same commitment that has been strengthened by the implementation of our renewed policy on refugees.

Everything I have said in this statement provides examples of what my country and Government have implemented for the effective promotion and implementation of a culture of peace. Ecuador is truly convinced that only by building a new multipolar order that actively incorporates the economic and political regional blocks and by strengthening horizontal relations, can a better, more just, democratic and diverse world be built.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the delegation of Belarus.

Mr. Dapkiunas (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): Belarus welcomes the results of the World Conference on Dialogue, which took place in Madrid in July 2008. We agree with the principles of dialogue, tolerance and mutual understanding set forth in the final Declaration. Belarus particularly appreciates the idea in the Madrid Declaration on the value of diversity in the culture of peoples and civilizations.

At the 2005 World Summit, the President of Belarus proposed to recognize the diversity of ways to achieve progressive development as a value of civilization. The purpose of the initiative was to support diversity of political, social and economic systems in today's world. Such diversity involves various ways of life for peoples, including religious and cultural aspects and historic legacies.

Diversity is certainly a value for world civilization. It is the diversity of the political, economic and social lives of peoples that is the prerequisite for effective dialogue, including a dialogue of cultures and religions. Supporting diverse ways of progressive development is also one of the most important factors in maintaining international peace and security. We agree with the appeal in the Madrid Declaration to encourage a dialogue of religions. For Belarus, the principles of interreligious and inter-ethnic tolerance, dialogue and cooperation have been an integral element of social life.

The historical religious and ethnic diversity in Belarus has led to an absence of conflicts on the basis of religious or ethnic intolerance. The favourable interreligious and interracial relations in Belarus are fostered by active State policy. We believe that the United Nations should broadly and decisively promote

the development of inter-ethnic and interreligious dialogue. We welcome the holding in the United Nations of yearly forums on encouraging dialogue among cultures and religions as an effective mechanism for exchanging experiences.

However, specific proposals that have been made in recent discussions in recent years have not yet been sufficiently reflected in decisions of the General Assembly, other bodies and specialized agencies of the United Nations system. We believe it is important to call upon the international community to assist in expanding education as an effective means to combat religious and racial intolerance; to enhance the innovative use of the latest information technologies for interreligious and inter-ethnic dialogue, especially among young people; to ensure political correctness in the media and their moral and ethical responsibility in the context of freedom of speech and also to expand academic exchange among countries. Belarus proposes that we consistently include these ideas in decisions of the General Assembly.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of Costa Rica.

Mr. Weisleder (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica wishes to express its thanks to King Abdullah Bin Abdelaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for his endeavours to bring about this meeting in the context of the dialogue among civilizations promoted by Spain and Turkey.

A country such as ours, which on 1 December will celebrate 60 years since we constitutionally and institutionally abolished our army, must welcome all efforts intended to achieve and promote peace. Here, it is worth recalling what Pope John Paul II stated with intellectual and spiritual clarity at the thirty-first session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO): in today's world, development is the new name for peace.

For its part, the United Nations, as the broadest most democratic and most inclusive organization of peoples and States, and faithful to its founding values, has stated, by remit of heads of State or Government in the Millennium Declaration (resolution 55/2), that the three pillars of its mission are peace, development and respect for human rights.

The Millennium Declaration tells us that those pillars are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. It is of

great symbolic significance that, in December, 60 years will have passed since both the abolition of the army in our country and the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. If only human rights were to prevail effectively and universally, how far we would have progressed towards a culture of peace.

Accordingly, there are two fundamental elements if we are to conceive, develop and disseminate a culture of peace. On the one hand, we must live in peace — in peace with our neighbour and with ourselves, deeply respecting the essential in all human beings, each of whom possesses inherent dignity. On the other hand, we must ensure that access to education is a true, effective and universal right.

Education, both in the home and at school, must convey respect for others: for their religions, cultures, physical and mental states and any other human or social attribute. The values about which we are talking today and which we are promoting must be the cornerstone of the educational materials used by our children and young people. Our Governments must ensure that no book, tape or education material of any sort contains concepts or ideas fostering discrimination, indifference, hate or violence against any human group.

It is undeniable that we are living in difficult times. While men and women of goodwill throughout the world praise peace and live in peace, weapons and petty or lofty ambitions fill our fields with blood when they should be planted with seeds and irrigated with water so that the natural world that God gave us may offer the rich fruit of the Earth that feeds all of us. While men and women of goodwill yearn for a solidarity that would organize and protect humanity, greed and selfishness are rampant. While people of goodwill work to bring close those who have been cast aside or considered to be without importance, ignorance or poorly understood tradition nevertheless keeps them afar and under domination.

However, against this backdrop, allow me here to recall the old adage that it is always darkest before the dawn. How much truth there is in that phrase. At a time when we are in the midst of wars, natural disasters and economic events that worry all of us, the prophetic vision and the dream of Martin Luther King, Jr., are ever more real. The power of his idealism and the power of change must overturn prejudice and mental barriers that, a short time ago, appeared invincible.

Martin Luther King and his ideals have reached the promised land. The culture of respect for diversity as the foundation of peace has taken a great leap forward.

From my country, Costa Rica, where, whenever we sing our national anthem, we say “Long live work and peace”, we raise our voice in this Hall to proclaim together with the prophet Isaiah that swords shall be beaten into ploughshares and that men shall learn war no more.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the delegation of Croatia.

Mr. Jurica (Croatia): Let me start by expressing my sincere appreciation to the President of the General Assembly for organizing this high-level meeting and to His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia for having undertaken this initiative. We have had the chance during the past two days to listen to heads of State or Government from the many diverse regions of the world, and we have heard them place a great deal of importance on the value of mutual dialogue and understanding. Their strong commitment to the promotion of these values can give rise to a future filled with promise and hope.

Today we live in a world that is closely linked through telecommunications and the global economy. We do not need to live close to one another to know that somewhere else in the world a different culture or religion or system of beliefs exists. As our citizens interact, our economies and our cultures also interact. In this interaction, mutual understanding of one another’s faith and culture is the basis for our well-being, our stability and our prosperity.

On the other hand, it would be wrong for any religion to claim superiority over others in terms of holding the highest truth. If we fail to understand and appreciate one another’s differences, religion and culture will eventually be used to promote and deepen conflicts, instead of bringing us closer together. The freedom to hold a belief of one’s choosing, or to change it, is an essential attribute of the human conscience and a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence and unity as one single but diverse human family.

As we celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is crucial to ensure that every single person has freedom of speech and expression and freedom of faith and belief, which

includes freedom of religion. That, in its ultimate form, is the basis for intercultural dialogue.

With its geographical position, Croatia has been at the crossroads of various religions and cultures for centuries. It is a place where Central and Eastern Europe meet the Mediterranean and where Christianity meets Islam and Judaism, the cradle of our belief in one God and creator. Croatia is a strong supporter of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, which is aimed at combating extremism and overcoming cultural misunderstandings among civilizations. Croatia has actively engaged in that process and is about to begin preparing for its national plan on the issue.

Croatia welcomes the idea behind the World Conference on Dialogue, held this year in Madrid, Spain, which brought together representatives of various religions in the hope that it would promote mutual understanding and tolerance. We would also like to draw attention to the recent meeting in Rome between Catholics and Muslims, at which a number of timely and pertinent issues were discussed. Such meetings are good examples of bridging the differences among cultures and religions where a common denominator can be found.

Religious communities and their leaders hold a great deal of power and responsibility in their hands. Believers listen to the words of such leaders and seek their guidance, especially at this time of change and challenges. The important responsibility of promoting mutual understanding and tolerance that rests with religious leaders provides them with a unique moral authority to guide people in the direction of accepting their neighbours and rejecting distorted uses of religion that exacerbate conflicts and tensions.

In many regions of the world, we see that interreligious and intercultural cooperation is a prerequisite for international peace and security. As a country rich in cultural diversity, we understand that a common and peaceful future for the benefit of all can be built only on the foundations of tolerance, understanding and reconciliation. We should all strive to accept our differences and use them as a bridge by which to bring nations and peoples together and build the conditions for a peaceful solution to long-lasting conflicts, rather than exacerbating dissimilarities created by historical or cultural differences or misgivings.

Although no one can change the past, we can all commit to strengthening our future prospects by investing in new generations. Our children were not born with prejudice in their hearts; they were taught it. If we offer them interfaith education based on the principle of mutual understanding and acceptance, they will grow up with a better chance to shape a world free of discrimination and intolerance.

The Acting President: I now call on the Chairman of the delegation of Sri Lanka.

Mr. Palihakkara (Sri Lanka): The delegation of Sri Lanka commends the President of the General Assembly and His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia for the initiative to convene this high-level meeting of the General Assembly on the subject "Culture of peace". The world community is confronted with multiple crises that touch upon human and inter-State behaviour in all its aspects, heightening tensions, uncertainty and even fear and anxiety. It is indeed timely to reflect on the need to understand and deal with the scourges of extremism, terrorism, hatred and xenophobic tendencies that lie at the root of those problems.

Initiatives on the dialogue among civilizations, the dialogue among faiths and the dialogue among peoples and communities are not new; they have been and remain an integral part of the human endeavour aimed at overcoming conflict and intolerance. About a decade ago, when theories regarding an imminent clash of civilizations were being propounded by some, there were wise initiatives in Asia to promote a dialogue among civilizations. That process has come a long way. It has been heartening to see its further evolution through high-level meetings that have been held at important venues in places ranging from Madrid to Phnom Penh and from Tehran to Astana, covering almost all corners of the world and now coming to fruition here at the United Nations in New York.

All those initiatives have been timely in a world beset by words and deeds of bigotry. The present dialogue can deepen mutual understanding and enable us to develop shared perspectives on common challenges affecting humanity and a vision for a collective response to such challenges, rooted in values and ethics.

A culture of peace should not be a rhetorical exercise or a matter of precept alone, nor is it a debate on values versus human rights or vice versa. It is self-

evident that a culture of peace is the core value underpinning all major religions of the world.

Moreover, the crises of the past and present notwithstanding, we live in an era in which examples of great men and women who have nurtured, practiced and given meaning to the concept of non-violence, tolerance and passive resistance, without resort to terror and without harm to fellow human beings, have become more relevant than ever before. Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and the living legend Nelson Mandela are but a few of those who continue to be icons of peace and reconciliation. Their missions and lives have drawn more on the inner strength of being human, proving beyond a shadow of a doubt that intolerance and terrorism have no place in any human endeavour to overcome oppression, denial or deprivation. Even today, there are a countless number of persons still out there who are practicing those ethics, providing best-practices approaches to peacebuilding and conflict resolution. As we invest time, resources and energy in forums such as this, it is also timely that we take a leaf from their lives as we reflect on the important aspect of advancing a culture of peace at all levels.

We live in an increasingly fragile and polarized world. Underdevelopment, poverty and a multiplicity of social and economic ills, compounded by hatred, terrorism and the defamation of religions and cultures, as well as unsustainable consumption and exploitation, continue to beset humanity. Environmental degradation, the erosion of ethical values, the continued weaponization of human security — including, of course, the menace of weapons of mass destruction — and organized crime continue to push the world towards further instability and crisis. While human ingenuity has heralded breathtaking developments in science and technology, the benefits of such creativity are increasingly being outweighed by the potential for misdirection and exploitation that they have entailed.

By definition, a culture of peace includes much more than just peace and security, which we often talk about. It encompasses the gamut of positive attributes needed to replace the culture of weapons and violence, misery and repression that has dominated the human history. These include respecting life, rejecting terrorism and violence, sharing with others, listening in order to understand, preserving the planet, rediscovering solidarity and participating in

democracy. There are yet more, which relate both to our way of life and to our relationships with fellow human beings. Compassion, not hatred, and informed inquiry, not blind adherence — as advocated in Buddhism — are key strands that run through the concept of a culture of peace.

A culture of peace presupposes realizing equity and equality for all, with justice and dignity. An absence of these would naturally negate any effort at achieving a global order conducive to stability and prosperity. A comprehensive approach to enhancing a culture of peace, therefore, remains predicated on a lasting commitment and the will to take meaningful measures on multiple fronts, essential to securing humanity.

First, we should place emphasis on the imperative of peaceful coexistence. At the same time, positive recognition of differences in the ways of life and the expressions of ideas, as well as the pursuit of beliefs, is of equal importance. We should both strengthen and expand the platform for dialogue. It is unfortunate that dialogue is often confused with argument, and consequently, an overemphasis on argument culture has overshadowed the importance of a culture of dialogue. This is true of many peacemaking efforts, whether inter-State or intra-State. We need to reverse that trend.

A positive affirmation that no religion, community, or ethnicity can be equated or associated with violence or terrorism is crucial to sustainable peace. Equally, no entity postulating or practicing terrorism can or should be allowed to claim to represent any community, ethnic or religious interests.

It is important to address vulnerabilities, compounded by backwardness, social and economic exclusions, if necessary even by upholding the value of affirmative action. It is also imperative that we take conscious and determined action to humanize our thoughts and conduct more. We witness, on a daily basis, the media and others describing ordinary events in militaristic terms. It is unfortunate that we continue to apply the dichotomy of combatants versus non-combatants to civilians, whereas the distinction should in fact be civilians versus non-civilians. The introduction of the term “collateral” into the lexicon of human relations is one of the most negative developments in recent years. It is time that we, and younger generations, were weaned away from such

thinking. Only terrorist groups would benefit from such weaponized thought processes.

Last but not least, we should build on the positive aspects of our different value systems and belief systems in order to harness a greater understanding and rapprochement. The media, like other actors and players, need to play a catalytic role in this context. It is time to desist from the promotion of conflict and the glorification of terrorism and rededicate ourselves to actively strengthening the foundation for multiculturalism and coexistence.

As a country where the four major religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity and Islam have coexisted for centuries in peace and harmony, Sri Lanka shares an intrinsic belief in the value and importance of a sustained dialogue among civilizations and cultures, as well as interreligious and intercultural cooperation for peace. That spirit and ethic of coexistence and mutual respect have been the bedrock of our 2,500 year-old civilization, founded on the core Buddhist values of compassion, understanding, modest living and friendliness towards nature. Buddhism and other religions have immense potential and scope to play crucial roles as religions of peace in culture of peace initiatives.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Chairman of the delegation of Bolivia.

Mr. Siles Alvarado (Bolivia) (*spoke in Spanish*): We are gathered here today to consider agenda item 45, entitled "Culture of peace", to think together of ways to strengthen dialogue among our various religions and of ways of achieving an alliance among our civilizations.

We are living through times of crisis and change. This consideration and search for unity among peoples has become of paramount importance in these turbulent times, these times of crisis and major challenges, times in which we are becoming aware that our world is on the brink of inevitable disaster, of global crisis, a world emergency that could be described in the following ways. First, climate change is causing ever stronger and more frequent disturbances and natural disasters. If certain critical thresholds are passed, there could suddenly be disastrous consequences, especially for the poorest nations and peoples.

Second, the depletion of the planet's natural resources, which are being drastically sapped owing to

over-exploitation by industrialized nations, which every year consume 30 per cent more of the world's natural resources than can be renewed.

Third, we have a water crisis. With urbanization, industrialization and increased use of energy, there has been a greater consumption of water, and water tables have been drawn upon to a greater degree, thus reducing the sources of this vital liquid in many areas of the world.

Fourth, the current crises in food production have resulted from climate change, speculation and the increasing conversion of agricultural produce into raw materials for agro-fuels. This is causing a drastic price hike and is gradually reducing world reserves.

Fifth, an energy crisis has arisen with the end of the era of cheap energy, above all, oil and gas — and yet, no alternative forms of energy have been found to replace them at the current levels of consumption. Neither are there energy models that could contribute to reducing consumption. We continue to see natural resources being pillaged.

Sixth, the current financial crisis has been spreading throughout the world in 2008 and has deepened the asymmetries between countries, burdening peoples with the responsibility of saving the system at the cost of seeing their rights eroded and unemployment increasing.

Seventh, there is the crisis of time, in which the time scale of industrial production clashes harshly with the rhythm of life, leading to a tremendous collision between the rhythm of natural time cycles and the linear time of history as measured by the clock.

This multifaceted crisis is an expression of the crisis of the capitalist system. As it worsens, it is becoming a factor that is de-stabilizing international relations.

If the countries of the world do not reach agreement on the necessary joint measures to resolve the crisis, the culmination of the effects of climate change in the world and depleted natural resources will mean that it will be more likely that many politicians will favour the military option. They would do so in an attempt to hold on to their privileged living standards for longer and maintain their control over access to oil deposits and strategic routes for the transport of hydrocarbons, but also over access to drinking water,

important mineral deposits, forests and land for food and biofuels, among other natural resources.

This global systemic crisis derives from a resurgence of racism as a tool of powerful groups and elites to entrench their privileges and to see in the others — those different from them, the ones they have colonized — a threat to their ability to continue to enjoy their accustomed lifestyle. In several countries and regions, racism has gone from speech to action and is expressed in violent acts against indigenous cultures, migrants and peoples of the South. Sometimes, this is subtly expressed through policies and control mechanisms in certain States.

Faced with this worrying perspective of the growing global crisis, the culture of life and peace has blossomed, a culture that is embodied by indigenous peoples, as has been demonstrated throughout history, and that is now gaining strength as an alternative to the unquestioned prevailing system. Our communities are fostering another, more balanced form of life and the construction of another Abya Yala — which is now called America — of another world.

We indigenous peoples wish to live not just together with other human beings but in harmony with Mother Earth. Indigenous nations throughout the world are the reservoir of ancestral wisdom and scientific knowledge for protecting life. They are the moral reserve and a decisive factor for saving the world. We as human beings have to recognize that we are part of Mother Nature and that we need to re-establish complementary relationships among ourselves and with nature.

In that framework, everybody and everything are of importance in our culture. We all have a space. We are all worth something. We all maintain a balance among ourselves. That is to say, we all need one another and we all belong to the culture of life. We are all a part of a community based on giving and receiving, on living in complementarity with each other, on the common good, on organized mutual support and on life together, in which capacities are developed without destroying human beings and nature. We are part of the Tama — the great family — which has always been present in the unity, complementarity, hearts and actions of indigenous peoples.

To contribute to this international debate, our President, Evo Morales, has put forward ten proposals,

ten commandments to save the planet, humankind and life. Among the most important proposals is the obligation to put an end to the capitalist system. If we wish to save Earth in order to save life and humankind, we must put an end to the very essence of capitalism, which is the seeking of profit at the cost of life. The serious effects of climate change and of the energy, food and financial crises are not a result of the actions of human beings in general, as is often explained. Rather, they are products of the prevailing capitalist system, its production and consumption networks and its destructive and predatory logic, which has made civilization inhuman, with unbridled industrial development eternally clashing with life.

Renouncing war is another inescapable task, because peoples do not win wars, only empires win wars. Nations do not win wars, only transnational corporations win wars. Wars benefit small groups of the powerful and not peoples. They destroy life and pillage natural resources. Nothing and nobody can be saved from war. Those who fight suffer and those who go hungry to feed war suffer. Mother Earth and the natural balance of life suffer. Above all, it is the human condition and those rights that we have built up little by little, as nations, that suffer.

It is essential to build a world free of imperialism and colonialism, where relations must be aimed at complementarity, the respect for diverse sovereign entities and identities and where the deep asymmetries that exist between one family and another, one country and another and one continent and another are taken into account.

Throughout the world, blocs for regional integration are being built. Those processes clearly show that we wish to bring about coexistence among our various peoples, economies and civilizations, to put an end to the unipolar world and bring about a balanced, multipolar one.

Another issue is how to put an end to wasting energy. In 100 years, we have used up fossil fuels that were created over millions of years. Some Governments set aside land to produce energy for machines and cars and not for human beings. We must implement policies to curb the overproduction of biofuels and, in this way, avoid hunger and poverty for our peoples.

We must become fully aware with regard to respect for Mother Earth. The capitalist system treats

her as a raw material, as a resource according to the system's predatory logic. But Earth is our home and cannot be turned into merchandise.

In this time of climate chaos and resource scarcity on our finite planet, we must put an end to consumerism, waste and luxury and consume only what is necessary. We must prioritize what we produce and consume locally, as well as exchanges among regions, thus stimulating self-sufficiency and the sovereignty of communities within the limits allowed by the health and resources of the planet. We must not go beyond what the Earth can provide to shelter us.

Industrialized nations must radically reorient their economies and readapt their production, consumption and energy use levels. They must abandon the vision of unbridled economic growth, which is utopian and suicidal. They must reduce industrialization and long-distance trade and promote local production and local agriculture, thereby overcoming the imbalances among nations.

The major problems facing humankind and the planet today are connected with the imbalances that have been created among nations and regions. We cannot tackle the various crises we have mentioned if these imbalances among countries persist. It is not a question of helping developing countries to achieve the same level of development as developed countries. The living arrangements in the North cannot be extended to the entire planet, because there are not enough resources on Mother Earth to withstand such pillaging of natural resources. If we were all to live at the same level as developed countries, we would need three or four more planets. This is unsustainable development.

Therefore, Bolivia talks of living well rather than of living better at the cost of others and nature. Living well is based on the life of our peoples, the riches of our communities: fertile land, clean air and water and a simple life, which can reduce our addiction to consumption and ensure balanced production.

Living better is a concept that implies that certain peoples can live better than others. However, if we live better and see others who are worse off, that is not living well. Exploiting and subjugating our neighbours or attacking nature might enable us to live better, but it is not living well. For us, living well means living in community, being complementary one to another rather than competitive, sharing and not taking advantage of our neighbours, living in harmony with others and with

nature and being aware of the interdependence among nations and regions and the interdependence of human beings with nature.

By awakening the ethical and moral values of our peoples and cultures, we should build brotherhood among nations, to make this new millennium a millennium of life, and not of death or war, a millennium of balance and complementarity. We, the nations of the world, must together decide on and direct our destinies. We must all, men and women, construct a culture of patience, of dialogue and, fundamentally, of life and peace. Together, we must bring about respect and harmonious and peaceful complementarity among our nations and communities.

Finally, we firmly believe that we can neither resolve nor satisfactorily address all the crises besetting us today unless we undertake discussions and profound reflection, here in the United Nations, on the new paradigms that must guide us in the twenty-first century.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the representative of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Mrs. Kafanabo (United Republic of Tanzania): The delegation of Tanzania is pleased to participate in this important debate on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, under the agenda item on the culture of peace. This high-level meeting has come at an opportune time, when the rejection of intolerance and a profound aspiration to live in peace and security are becoming an increasingly salient feature of society today.

We congratulate the President of the General Assembly and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for successfully organizing this high-level meeting. We believe that its outcome will contribute to a better understanding and a deepening dialogue among cultures, religions and faiths. All of us therefore have an obligation to maintain the momentum that will be generated through this meeting.

We also wish at this juncture to commend the work undertaken by UNESCO and other United Nations agencies, the Alliance of Civilizations and the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace in promoting the culture of peace.

The importance of intercultural and interreligious harmony cannot be underscored sufficiently in the

United Republic of Tanzania, a country with a diverse population. We have over 100 ethnic tribes and several religions, which coexist in harmony and with full freedom to express their cultural and religious diversities. In Tanzania we have succeeded in having four peaceful transitions of the presidency. The union of the Tanzania mainland and the island of Zanzibar 44 years ago, has stood the test of time and is an exemplary case of unity of sovereign countries.

The Government of Tanzania firmly believes in fostering a culture of peace for sustainable development and the prosperity of all people. The culture of peace and the unity that we enjoy in Tanzania has not come about by itself; it has been developed and nurtured. We have consistently instilled in our children and our people the values of tolerance and dialogue. We have further continued to impress upon them the need to refrain from the use of force and violence and instead to reason with and respect each other, for we know that the costs of conflicts are devastating.

The freedom of religious belief, worship and practice is enshrined in our Constitution. However, we go beyond the expression and protection of the right to faith and worship and encourage dialogue between various faiths and religions to help to develop the understanding of the faiths and religious beliefs of others and to reduce ignorance. Mutual understanding breeds respect for each other, while ignorance is the seed of religious bigotry and intolerance and can be used by a few disillusioned people to sow seeds of misunderstanding and discord in society.

The responsibility for instilling the culture of peace is not the responsibility of the Government alone. Concerted efforts are needed from all stakeholders, such as parliaments and civil society, including religious and faith-based organizations.

The Helsinki Process on Globalization and Democracy, which Finland and Tanzania co-chaired, and its final report, which was presented to the Secretary-General in September 2008 by the Presidents of Tanzania and Finland, underscored that globalization had brought changes with it, not only in world politics, but also diversity in the people and cultures in many of our countries. In this regard, the involvement of different stakeholders and international collaboration and cooperation are equally essential in meeting the objectives of the Decade for the Culture of Peace.

We are encouraged that one of the main goals of the culture of peace is to ensure that the Charter of the United Nations is adhered to and enhances the creation of a culture where peace will prevail. Tanzania, as one of the champions of peace in the African continent and beyond, will continue to support the Decade for the Culture of Peace, the Alliance of Civilizations and the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation. We should endeavour to ensure that the United Nations continues to play a leading role in these initiatives.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of Nepal.

Mr. Acharya (Nepal): I would like to express our sincere appreciation for the convening of this timely high-level meeting on the culture of peace. We commend the initiative of His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia for convening this meeting. The presence of so many world leaders here is a testimony of the collective commitment to the cause of an enduring culture of peace in the world, for bringing about harmony and understanding among different religions, cultures and civilizations.

Peace is the highest calling and highest ideal of the United Nations. It is among the most important objectives of our Organization. The United Nations embraces the universally shared values and goals for the culture of peace. In this context it is very important that we take up the agenda of the culture of peace, dialogue and alliance among civilizations and religions to promote harmony, tolerance and fraternity among the world's various cultures, religions and civilizations.

Nepal appreciates various initiatives on the issue of the culture of peace, alliance and dialogue among civilizations and harmony among the world's religions and cultures, including the decision to include the culture of peace on the agenda of the General Assembly. The United Nations system can do a lot to promote interfaith dialogue and interface among civilizations, bringing together Governments, religious institutions, civil society leaders and the media to act together in the interest of the culture of peace.

The messages of peace and harmony resonate in every culture, civilization and faith. Nepal is a cradle, a confluence of various religions, cultures and civilizations, with Hinduism, Buddhism and various native religions observed by diverse ethnic groups and indigenous peoples. Nepal is a perfect example of tolerance and harmony among peoples who observe

various religions and cultures. Although we have had our share of conflict and violence, which we are putting behind us through a nationally driven peace process, it is a fact that religious and cultural differences are not a source of conflict in the country.

Today, Nepal has made remarkable progress towards peace, democracy and development through our own creative peace process. The peaceful resolution of Nepal's decade-long conflict reflects the importance of the culture of peace. The people of Nepal have arrived at the conclusion that all disagreements will henceforth be resolved through dialogue, accommodation and the verdict of the people through democratic means.

Nepal is the country of birth of Lord Buddha, the Apostle of Peace and the Light of Asia. The teachings of Buddha include the ideals of peace, compassion, non-violence and tolerance, which are among the guiding principles of the United Nations. In that context, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the Secretary-General for his homage to Lumbini, the sacred birthplace of Buddha, during his recent visit to Nepal. I would like to take this opportunity to state that we are committed to developing Lumbini into a city of world peace. The United Nations, which was significantly involved in the Lumbini development master plan, can play a significant role in the development of Lumbini as a fountain of world peace, which will greatly contribute to the culture of peace in the world.

Peace cannot develop in a vacuum, especially when people are forced to live in abject poverty, in the face of so much prosperity in the world. The international community should therefore invest further in sustainable economic and social development, so that the world's increasing population will not have to resort to deadly competition over shrinking resources.

Let me conclude by saying that respect for human rights and the diversity of cultures, religions and civilizations and the promotion of sustainable development should be at the core of the activities of the United Nations to promote a culture of peace in the world.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of Argentina.

Mr. Argüello (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): My delegation would also like to express its gratitude for

the initiative of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to hold this high-level meeting. I should also like to thank the President of the General Assembly for agreeing to hold today's meeting.

Argentina believes fully in the important role played by the United Nations in bringing together peoples of different cultures and religions. In that connection, we welcome the holding of the Madrid World Conference on Dialogue and the Declaration it adopted as a significant contribution to that noble objective.

We would also like to thank the Secretary-General for his efforts to bring about the culture of peace and genuine dialogue among peoples, cultures and religions and to implement resolution 62/90, in which the General Assembly affirmed that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constituted important dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and the culture of peace.

Through its various agencies, the United Nations has carried out a series of efforts — albeit utilizing emphatically different approaches and mandates — to promote and implement the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, which was adopted by the General Assembly in September 1999. In that connection, it is worth mentioning the work done by UNESCO, which included cultural and other efforts focused on the religious aspect of international dialogue. Among additional initiatives, I should like to refer in particular to the Alliance of Civilizations, an effort to which the Argentine Republic has given its utmost support since it was launched in 2004 on the initiative of the Government of the Kingdom of Spain with the support of Turkey.

In line with the report of the High-level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations and its plan of action, allow me to recall that Argentina has promoted the dissemination and strengthening of the Alliance of Civilizations in the Latin American and Caribbean region. In that regard, Argentina organized a regional seminar on the theme "Women and the Alliance of Civilizations: opportunities and challenges", which was held in Buenos Aires on 28 and 29 April 2008 and included the participation of governmental experts and civil society representatives from every Latin American and Caribbean country.

Such a committed effort as the Alliance of Civilizations could not ignore gender issues and the

status of women throughout the world, in which women suffer scandalous inequalities and various forms of discrimination. On several occasions, we have reiterated that the report of the High-level Group, which was appointed by the Secretary-General, has itself drawn attention to disturbing facts including, for example, that 70 per cent of children who do not attend school are girls and that no less than two thirds of the world's illiterate people are women or children. Thus, inequality, discrimination and marginalization as regards women are therefore indisputable facts that have a direct impact on how we view the other, as well as on the possibility of a genuine and constructive dialogue among societies and cultures.

The statements, conclusions and recommendations of the Buenos Aires seminar have been compiled in a book entitled *Women and the Alliance of Civilizations: Opportunities and Challenges*, which was launched and distributed on the occasion of the last ministerial meeting of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations. The book was later sent to every delegation of the Organization's Member States.

It was especially enlightening to realize that there could potentially be analogous situations between acts of intolerance in the Middle East and certain situations in Central America stemming from the phenomena of colonization and, subsequently, immigration, which have marked the history of our continent. That experience is an especially interesting aspect of a region such as Latin America and the Caribbean, where major migratory flows have historically converged to transplant hopes and dreams in places of destination. Inevitably, however, the same prejudices that existed where those flows originated were also brought to our region. Those issues were the subject of debate at the regional seminar held in Buenos Aires. We hope that the work begun there will continue to be developed in the coming years.

In conclusion, Argentina will continue to play an active role in promoting and expanding dialogue and understanding among societies and cultures in the various regional and international forums in which we participate, especially as regards the lofty goals of the Alliance of Civilizations.

Lastly, we believe that all countries that share those ideals have difficult work ahead, including a very real agenda to implement. I assure the Assembly that

Argentina will spare no effort and will continue to participate actively in that noble task.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the chairman of the delegation of Cameroon.

Mr. Tommo Monthe (Cameroon) (*spoke in French*): We note with appreciation the report of the Secretary-General contained in document A/63/262, as well as his note contained in document A/63/127. We also welcome the holding of this high-level debate devoted to the interreligious and intercultural dialogue, aimed at establishing a culture of peace. Among other things, this year's high-level debate is part of a tradition that has been taking root at the United Nations for several years.

As the Assembly is aware, Cameroon has always associated itself with that tradition. Just to limit myself to the recent past, I note that my country was a sponsor of resolution 61/221, adopted in 2006, whereby the General Assembly decided to hold in 2007 a high-level dialogue on cooperation among religions and cultures. My country was also a sponsor of resolution 62/90, adopted in 2007, which affirmed that mutual understanding and dialogue among religions constitute important aspects of dialogue among civilizations and of a culture of peace.

As in the past, this high-level debate is fully relevant. That is why this year, once again, we have become a sponsor of the two draft resolutions (A/63/L.23 and A/63/L.24/Rev.1) submitted under agenda item 45.

Today's discussion is relevant because our world continues to pay a heavy price for the lack of understanding and absence of dialogue. Economic imbalances and, especially, intolerance and bigotry continue to cause untold suffering for peoples throughout the world. Intolerance and bigotry are in fact phenomena that underlie, inter alia, the terrorism that spares no continent. Intolerance is also the rejection of others, which underlies all the destructive fanaticism that we have seen throughout the world. That is why serious thought and decisive action remain necessary in this regard.

It must be said that the idea of a dialogue of cultures and religions is not in and of itself totally new. However, it should be acknowledged that the idea was given new life immediately following 11 September 2001. Dumbstruck, the world found itself face to face

with the question of its existence and its future. Analysts of all stripes, overtaken by the trap of urgency, thought that they had found all the answers in the idea of a clash of civilizations. Attractive and powerful as a simplistic idea may be, this thesis held that humankind had entered an era of conflict of a new kind. It was as if different civilizations, cultures and religions could not agree on common principles and that by their very nature they were destined to fight for domination.

Cameroon has mobilized all of its energy in order to promote a culture of peace, both within and without its borders. Internally, our slogan, “Peace, work and homeland”, begins with the word “peace”, and that highlights the importance that we attach to this essential value.

My country, a true mosaic of peoples, cultures and religions, ensures respect for freedom of belief and religion for all, representation and harmony among the components of our population within institutions, and the promotion of bilingualism and of Cameroonian languages and cultures.

Twice, in 1985 and in 1995, Pope John Paul II visited Cameroon. During his visits, people of all religious faiths gathered together to enshrine the virtues of peace, ecumenism, understanding and fraternity among all people. It is in that same spirit that the Government and the people of Cameroon intend to greet Pope Benedict XVI in March, during his first visit to Africa.

In terms of foreign relations, my country eloquently demonstrates its commitment to a culture of peace through a policy of friendship, solidarity and good-neighbourliness with the countries of the Central African subregion, the continent of Africa and the rest of the world.

Regarding the peaceful settlement of disputes, as attested by the Bakassi dispute between Cameroon and its sister republic, Nigeria, which concluded successfully, Cameroon is convinced that there is no crisis pitting two States against each other, much less any internal crisis, that cannot be solved peacefully through the virtue of dialogue. In this regard, President Paul Biya stated in a message to the nation,

“The choice we have made in the Bakassi dispute — to see right prevail over might — has been found to be fully justified because we are a

people profoundly dedicated to peace, which we are endeavouring to preserve and without which the progress and development to which our peoples rightly aspire would not be achievable.”

This dedication of my country to the culture of peace is also reflected by our readiness to take part in peacekeeping operations initiated or sponsored by the United Nations or the African Union. This contribution also involves training, for which my country has created, with donor support, a training school for peacekeeping and security.

Like all peace-loving nations, we believe that peoples throughout the world need a vision that highlights the values of peace, tolerance and dialogue. That vision should be embodied in several areas.

In terms of education, we should promote recognition and respect for other people and their differences. In this regard, my country welcomes the intersectoral activities launched by UNESCO, and especially the platform entitled “Contributing to the dialogue among civilizations and cultures and a culture of peace”, which is designed to encourage the updating of education and pedagogical materials to promote, in particular among young people, respect for and recognition of diversity of belief. We note with satisfaction the cooperation between the Alliance of Civilizations and UNESCO, and especially the signing in Madrid, in January 2008, of a memorandum of understanding providing for joint activities fostering dialogue and mutual understanding.

The President took the Chair.

In terms of information and communications, we should use the media and new technologies to encourage the values of tolerance. From that standpoint, my country welcomes the launching in February 2008 by the Alliance of Civilizations of a media rapid reaction mechanism in support of the activities of media professionals.

In an organization like the United Nations, a constant culture of peace should be one of the decisive elements for the overarching common interests of humankind. That is why we should maintain at the core of this culture the virtues of dialogue, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, respect and mutual esteem, understanding, harmony and a love for oneself and for others.

Where there is no peace, we must together try to sow it, cultivate it and maintain it. Where we do have peace, we should together try to consolidate it, nurture it, cherish it and above all share it, for mutual benefit, because if we let it get away from us, it would be as if we had decided to do without the air we breathe.

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

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): It is a great pleasure for me to address this important high-level meeting. I wish to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting. I wish to thank most sincerely the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia for initiating this meeting and his dedication and contribution to the pursuit of interfaith dialogue and understanding.

When I look at God's creation, I marvel at his wonderful architecture. From majestic mountains, valleys, rolling hills, plains, glimmering sand, vibrant rain forests; whatever it may be, it is all beautiful scenery. Then I turn my thoughts to the living creatures. I see tall people, short people, people of all shapes, people of all colours and hues. I see a variety of animals and bird species in their varied and beautiful colours. Again, I marvel at the wonderful architecture God created. Finally, I recall different cultures, faiths and religious beliefs and values. In short, diversity is beautiful, as God so decreed.

Who are we then to disrupt that wonderful chemistry that God put in place? Those extremists who distort religion for their own purposes and who kill in the name of religion thinking they will go to heaven: they will be disappointed when they find themselves in hell instead. Those people have rebelled against God's creation. We should strive to live in peace with one another and to respect different cultures and faiths, for no faith is superior to another.

I was enthralled by what His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud said yesterday, at the 46th meeting: "Religions, through which the Almighty God sought to bring happiness to mankind should not be instruments that cause misery."

This meeting is significant as it represents an opportunity for all faiths of the entire world community to interact with a view to enhancing our collective, peaceful coexistence and bonds of

friendship. It is also significant because of the preparations under way for the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures in 2010 by the United Nations system. We have witnessed in the recent past a number of commendable initiatives at the international level to promote interfaith dialogue. This meeting is unique because it is an unparalleled opportunity for us all to dialogue as people of different faiths and cultures under the United Nations umbrella but with a common goal and destiny. It is imperative that we use this umbrella to engage in a very serious dialogue and that is why Uganda gives this initiative its full support. However, it is necessary that in all our endeavours a coordinated effort be made to minimize the duplication of initiatives.

We in Uganda consider interfaith dialogue a necessity and not an option. We know that all religions share common foundations. They espouse equality, peace and tolerance. We should therefore spare no effort individually, nationally and at the global level to become more active in countering ignorance by offering positive information on interfaith beliefs. We should dispel negative stereotypes and extremism. Uganda is a country of multiple religious faiths where people of different faiths live side by side in relative harmony. As a country, we have deliberately encouraged interfaith collaboration and partnership. The experience has been exemplary and has generated consensus among the different faith communities to work together. It has resulted in true friendships and other opportunities to work together as a community. We are committed to maintain and sustain that momentum and are willing to share our experience and make a positive contribution to this process.

This meeting comes at a time of momentous events and changes in the world. It comes one day after the ninetieth anniversary of the end of the First World War and at a time when our focus is on conflict prevention and resolution initiatives. It also comes at a time when we are refocusing on human dignity, family values and development. Our faith should be a catalyst to bring us together as it has done today to reflect, understand and address these challenges. Together we must do more to address the challenges of poverty, widespread hunger, gender inequality, environmental deterioration and the lack of education, health care and clean water. We should deal conclusively on actions to reduce debt and increase aid, trade and technology transfer to those less fortunate.

We should also recognize that the range of human development in the world is vast and uneven, with astounding progress in some areas amid stagnation and dismal decline in others. As people of faith, we should recognize that balance and stability in the world require the commitment of all nations, rich and poor, and a global development compact to extend the wealth of possibilities to all people. Our religious and moral values should inspire us to address the problems that face humanity. They should be our rallying call to deal with the important issues of our time for peace and cooperation. We must commit resources towards this endeavour.

This meeting underlines the crucial role faith can play in enhancing peaceful coexistence, peace, harmony and prosperity for us all. It is our duty and must be our pledge. Uganda supports this initiative and it is our commitment to work tirelessly for a peaceful and prosperous world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I now give the floor to the representative of Côte d'Ivoire.

Mr. Bailly (Côte d'Ivoire) (*spoke in French*): On behalf of His Excellency Mr. Laurent Gbagbo, President of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, who requested that I convey to the Assembly his wishes for the full success of this meeting, permit me to express our gratitude to you, Mr. President, for having convened this high-level meeting. The Ivorian delegation also takes this opportunity to convey to His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, the thanks of Mr. Youssouf Bakayoko, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Côte D'Ivoire, for having initiated this process, which challenges world leaders and religious leaders to urgently establish a genuine and frank dialogue among religions with a view to the further promotion of a culture of peace. Although he was invited to participate in this important meeting, Minister Bakayoko was unable to travel to New York for scheduling reasons.

Côte d'Ivoire celebrates a national peace holiday on 15 November each year. We long ago incorporated the values of peace and tolerance into our development programmes, our policy of national construction and coexistence with neighbouring countries and our foreign policy. Thus, our country cannot remain on the sidelines of this historic meeting on the culture of peace. Côte d'Ivoire unreservedly supports the Saudi

initiative and United Nations efforts to establish a permanent framework for dialogue among religions and to adopt appropriate strategies to promote the implementation of all the recommendations resulting from this meeting.

Our country, like other nations whose representatives have spoken before me, remains convinced that the establishment of such a dialogue would inevitably give rise to a new era in international relations firmly based on an innovative vision of hope for humankind. Indeed, there is an urgent need for the world to transcend religious differences and to work resolutely towards a rapprochement of civilizations, respecting the convictions and faiths of all. That is why our country fully endorses the two draft resolutions before the General Assembly on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010 (A/63/L.23), and on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/63/L.24/Rev.1).

In that regard, we urge the Assembly to adopt both draft resolutions in order to show our collective commitment to this new process. Clearly, it will result in a platform for exchanges that will undoubtedly help to bridge the chasm of misunderstanding and resentment that exists between civilizations. With a strong political and collective commitment, we must promote all the shared ethical and moral values advocated by religions in their diversity.

We believe that world leaders must, in addition to current initiatives, go beyond mere wishful thinking to engage in religious dialogue in order to carry out policies that will reduce or even destroy identity-based and ideological barriers that have long served as pretexts for the perpetuation of systems of exploitation and oppression that have helped to divide the world into blocs of mistrust.

Justification of the culture of profit and the protection of some interests at the expense of others have resulted in the demonization and subjugation of entire sectors of humankind in a context of extreme despair and insecurity linked to the aggravation of extremism, fanaticism and intolerance and to the decline of the moral and political principles that led to the establishment of the United Nations immediately after the Second World War. It is obvious that, ultimately, this Manichean vision of world affairs,

which is linked to the supremacy of one religion over another and of one race over another, as well as to the promotion of a single school of thought or model for society, can only be suicidal for humankind, which is rich in its pluralism.

The path of Côte d'Ivoire throughout its recent history shows how the adoption of the culture of peace as a pillar of development and an aspect of integration has helped our country to overcome the danger of implosion and not to succumb to ethnic and religious chaos in the economic crisis that it has been experiencing for several years. Indeed, in Côte d'Ivoire, as stated by the late President Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the founding father of our nation, peace is not an empty word; it is a behaviour. The Félix Houphouët-Boigny Peace Prize, awarded each year by UNESCO, emphasizes that support for the culture of peace is a dynamic approach to action.

It was on behalf of the culture of peace, which is at the centre of his governmental policy, that President Gbagbo launched direct dialogue with the former Ivorian rebels, leading to the Ouagadougou Political Agreement, which enabled us to reunify our country. Indeed, our national experience demonstrates that the world can overcome division in order to build a new world order based on partnership with a human face, anchored in human development and the correction of imbalances.

That is why we agree with those who firmly believe that the real challenge lies not in the predictable rhetoric of statements of intention, but rather in persuading the decision makers of this world to opt for a society that would place greater priority on the moral dimension of managing world affairs, which would help to help fulfil the purposes of the United Nations as we celebrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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

Mr. Ousseïn (Comoros) (*spoke in French*): At a time when the world has been hit head-on by crises of all sorts related to finance, energy, food and identity, and when doubt, intolerance, mistrust, selfishness and isolationism have supplanted tolerance and fraternal solidarity among peoples, the holding of this important dialogue among religions is more meaningful than ever. In that regard, I should like, on behalf of the Union of the Comoros, to thank His Majesty Abdullah

Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, who has taken the welcome initiative to promote the holding of a dialogue among religions on several occasions.

We believe that to engage in dialogue with another religion is to discover what it shares with us and to find ourselves in it. Thus, in addition to what makes us different and separates us, there is a commonality among believers that is deep and strong enough that they realize that they are similar and united.

In a world that has become an increasingly interdependent global village, our salvation lies in the awareness that nothing is really sustainable without the other. We must have respect for his or her faith, religion and differences in the firm conviction that we are all links in the same chain. Our solidarity and survival depends on our common will to build a better world, inspired by the spirit of justice, tolerance, sharing and fraternal solidarity.

The Union of the Comoros, a Muslim nation known for its legendary hospitality, has always been profoundly dedicated to the daily practice of tolerance and respect for human dignity. It is firmly convinced that human beings, as God's creatures and with a multiplicity of cultures and civilizations are a source of wealth and thus should not be a source of conflict.

All religions and all humankind today are faced with the challenges of all the drifting of an increasingly dehumanizing and unjust modern world. It must be acknowledged that the Muslim world is increasingly becoming victim to the policy of double standards. We consider that Islamophobia has become one of the great evils of our times since the end of the cold war and 11 September. That is a result of injustice and ignorance.

Interreligious dialogue can help to bring people to more understanding and, undoubtedly, do away with the logic of the clash of civilizations. We endorse the thought of the late President Léopold Sédar Senghor, who spoke of "enrichment of our differences to converge towards the universal". Learning to know oneself in order to live together whatever the circumstance is an essential step for enrichment of differences and for building a culture of peace.

Since all believers of all religions are called to be instruments of love and harmony for all of humankind,

they must renounce all forms of oppression and terrorism, especially when such acts are committed in the name of religion.

Finally, because there can be no peace without development, and convinced that no believer can remain indifferent to injustice and poverty, the Union of the Comoros, in the framework of this dialogue, calls upon all believers to unite in order to relieve the hungry and to work together for a new, more just, more transparent and more equitable world order, taking into account the situation of the poorest and most impoverished.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker in the debate. We shall now proceed to take a decision on draft resolution A/63/L.24/Rev.1, entitled “Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace”.

I should like to announce that since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have expressed the wish to become sponsors: Afghanistan, Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, China, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Grenada, Honduras, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Japan, Mali, Paraguay, Peru, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Trinidad and Tobago, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/63/L.24/Rev.1 was adopted (resolution 63/22).

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Before giving the floor to the representative of the United States, who wishes to speak in explanation of position on the resolution just adopted, may I remind delegations that explanations of position are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mr. McMahan (United States of America): The United States was founded on the principle of freedom of religion. This freedom, enshrined in our Constitution, has nourished a rich diversity of religions that have contributed greatly to the growth and vitality of our society for over 400 years. The Republic of the Philippines has also enshrined the concept of freedom of religion in its Constitution and has been active in promoting the principle. We commend President

Arroyo for her efforts to promote and protect human rights in her region and around the world.

As in past years, the text before us has much to recommend it. It acknowledges the importance of religious and cultural diversity and affirms that mutual understanding and dialogue are important for achieving a true and lasting peace. It recognizes the importance of education, and it recognizes the vital role of the news media, whose ability to work freely and objectively is crucial to open and honest dialogue, even when the news they report is unpleasant or critical.

Indeed, without the freedom for each and every individual to express his or her opinions or beliefs, any attempt to promote dialogue, diversity and understanding rings hollow. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the sixtieth anniversary of which we are celebrating this year, is clear. Article 19 reads:

“Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.”

The United States affirms unequivocally that free expression is the proper antidote for intolerance. Without the freedom to share thoughts and opinions, we cannot hope to break down the ignorance and mistrust that breeds violence. A widely cherished principle among Americans is that, while we may not always agree with what someone might say, we will fight for their right to say it. We must honour that principle even if in some instances the words may be offensive. The remedy for offensive speech is more speech and more dialogue and more understanding — not less.

For those reasons, the resolution before us must not in any way be read to restrict peaceful expression of opinion or belief. The right of all people to think and express themselves freely and peacefully is the birthright of all humanity. We cannot countenance efforts by some to roll back the fundamental freedom of expression.

Let me be clear. Unfortunately, there are some Governments that have misused, and will continue to misuse, United Nations resolutions and declarations to justify imprisonment, torture and even death sentences for those who offer interpretations of religion — or of

proper governance — that differ from those of the Government in power. Sadly, that tendency is so widely prevalent that many non-governmental organizations have begun tracking those cases, as has my Government.

We ask the members of this body to ensure that United Nations resolutions are not misused in that way and to hold accountable those Governments that seek to stain the United Nations by associating it with their acts of intolerance or brutality. Members of society must be able to engage in the open exchange of views without fear of recrimination if we are to develop the understanding and trust necessary to get along and live with one other.

The President: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of position.

As we come to the close of this remarkable meeting, I am both heartened and astonished by the outpouring of appeals that we have heard over the past two days. I thank all participants for contributing to this ongoing dialogue on the culture of peace.

This meeting has proved that while we do, obviously, have differences in our religions and theologies, we are very much united in our essential values. Just as important, we must apply those values if we are to survive the consequences of the converging man-made crises that we face at this critical historical juncture.

Religions and theologies are necessarily rooted in cultures and are thus inevitably different. We should celebrate and thank God for such diversity. While we might agree that homogenization is good for milk, it is not good for human cultures. We must defend the cultural identity of all peoples with the same determination with which we defend the biodiversity of our planet.

At the level of values, whether faith-based or flowing from our rich ethical and philosophical traditions, we see the hand of God. There are, however, values, or rather anti-values, that do not come from those roots. They spring from the dominant culture that foments hatred, intolerance, greed and social irresponsibility.

His Majesty, our brother the King of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, expressed that very clearly:

“Every tragedy suffered by the world today is but a result of the abandonment of the noble principles enunciated by all religions and cultures. The roots of all global crises can be found in human denial of the eternal principle of justice.” (A/63/PV.46)

We have heard calls for restoring the values of compassion and solidarity to the increasingly barren landscape of political decision-making. Speakers from all corners of the Earth have insisted that we put people above profit as the ultimate measure of success in the increasingly heartless and bankrupt world of business.

From our brother Shimon Peres, President of Israel, we heard that we have abandoned our faith by opting for greed. He pointed out that, for us to change the world, we must first change ourselves. I could not agree with him more. Referring to this meeting, he said that it was capable of beginning a movement of great importance to the world.

We note the call by Mr. Gordon Brown, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, to apply our values to ensure that we be remembered as the generation that ended illiteracy and reversed our negative impact on climate change.

We have heard from those who adhere to no particular faith, but bring messages of hope and love, for surely the values that are central to our faiths can be just as strongly felt and defended by those who are not religious.

We have heard urgent appeals to transcend our narrow self-interests as nations, peoples, communities and individuals. We have heard the call to restore trust, care and solidarity in our institutions.

The message is very clear: Either we restore the timeless values of brotherhood and sisterhood or we will surely flounder in a morass of indifference and self-induced destruction, which will extend to the entire planet.

We have come together in the midst of a gathering perfect storm, whose intensity and destructiveness are forcing all of us to rethink the way that we are conducting ourselves as human beings. We are aware that the storm is of our own making, and that it will take heroic measures to prevent it from destroying our aspirations to economic, social and spiritual well-being, wherever we are in the world.

We have come together realizing that we must take responsibility for the billions of people who are living in inexcusable poverty and deprivation. Leaders have referred to the innocent millions whose lives are tipping into crisis and poverty because of the irresponsibility and greed of people in far-off places. We must change that with a sense of urgency.

We have defined this moment as a turning point in human history, where courageous, even heroic leadership is needed. Let us draw on the reservoirs of love and solidarity that we all possess. Let us be courageous and heroic. I deeply believe we can.

In his statement at the beginning of this meeting, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud said:

“Our dialogue, which will be conducted in a civilized manner, should revive and consolidate

those lofty ideals among peoples and nations. No doubt, that will constitute a glorious triumph of what is most noble in human beings over what is most evil in them, and will give humankind hope for a future in which justice, security and a dignified life will prevail over injustice, fear and poverty.” (A/63/PV.46)

This has been such a meeting. In a couple of weeks, at our meeting on financing for development in Doha, we will have a chance to show the world that we are, indeed, serious about making solidarity the guiding principle in our resolutions and in our actions.

(spoke in Spanish)

The Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 45.

The meeting rose at 8.10 p.m.