



General Assembly

Sixty-third session

46th plenary meeting

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Official Records

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann (Nicaragua)

The meeting was called to order at 10.20 a.m.

Agenda item 45

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: Our world is experiencing an extremely difficult period, the worst since the founding of the United Nations. In fact, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the future of humankind depends on our ability and willingness to take advantage of the lessons and opportunities presented by today's multiple and interrelated crises. It is a time of numerous bankruptcies, but the worst of these is the moral bankruptcy of humankind's self-proclaimed "more advanced societies", which has spread throughout the world. It is not only Wall Street that needs to be bailed out. We need to bail out all of humankind from its social insensitivity. From now on, solidarity must guide and direct all human activity. In other words, morals and ethics must be given the central place in our lives that they should occupy.

Based on scientific evidence, we are now aware of the accelerating destruction of the life-sustaining capacity of Earth and the real possibility of the disappearance of the human species. Both are attributable to irresponsible human behaviour and to the unbridled greed and irrational consumerism that

characterize developed societies. We must choose between allowing these values to dominate our societies and taking the necessary steps to ensure that solidarity and social responsibility become the guiding principles of human activity, including in the economic and political spheres.

In the inaugural address I delivered two months ago, at the 1st plenary meeting, I attributed this critical state of affairs in our world to what I called insane and suicidal selfishness. But I also said then that this crisis could and should be turned into an opportunity to take the kind of courageous actions that are needed to ensure new levels of cooperation among humans and between people and nature, and thereby ensure a better world for present and future generations.

One of the most burning problems that we face today is the shameful reality that, despite the fact that we have the knowledge and the financial and technological resources to prevent it, half of the human population subsists at levels of hunger, malnutrition and poverty that are wholly incompatible with their inherent dignity and rights. This situation is not only shameful, but it is also, to use religious terminology, downright sinful.

We are all aware of this shameful reality. We also know that we have the means to do something about it. What is obviously lacking is the political will to move from rhetorical acknowledgment of this reality to concrete, sustained and coordinated action at the local and global levels. Allow me, in a moment, to propose some ways to apply our values to concrete actions.

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Great spiritual and moral strength is necessary for the kinds of actions that are required. And that is precisely why we have gathered here today: to join forces, as people of faith and/or of deep ethical convictions, to tap into our vast reserves of moral strength and awaken from our indifference to the fate of others. The United Nations has very appropriately elaborated a complex agenda for making the world a better place. But progress is too slow. We are running out of time and do not seem to have the energy and conviction required to move any faster. We must not hesitate to draw on the moral force of our values of faith and ethical convictions to meet today's challenges.

Before going any further, let me say that I feel very privileged to be presiding over this meeting, the purpose of which is to use our values that are based on faith and deeply held ethical convictions to seek solutions to the most burning issues of our time and which are reflected in the agenda of this General Assembly. I would be remiss if I did not likewise acknowledge the profound gratitude I feel for our brother, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, for calling to our attention the need to hold this meeting. There is absolutely nothing more important at this time in the odyssey of human experience than to place our faith-based values and ethical convictions at centre stage in our efforts to cope with the convergence of crises that we are now facing on a global scale.

In order for this two-day session of the General Assembly to achieve the hoped-for results, we must make it absolutely clear that we are not gathered here to talk about religion or theology. This forum would not be the appropriate one for such discourse. We are here today to pledge to place our reserves of moral strength at the service of the goals of the United Nations.

A similar exercise was undertaken 63 years ago and the outcome was one of the most glorious achievements of humankind — the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Today, confronted with the many problems that beset humankind, it is more than ever necessary to summon up these same ethical and moral values in order to move from declarations to actions that respond effectively to the numerous problems of our time. Making declarations is fine, but the time has come for action, for us to demonstrate that we believe in our declarations. We know that nothing

short of heroic decisions and actions can awaken us from our moral coma.

Although social responsibility is a basic law in each of the world's religions and in all ethical and philosophical traditions, we have allowed ourselves to become contaminated by the spirit of selfishness and individualism, which are the principal values, or rather, anti-values, of the globally dominant culture.

This culture declares ethics and morals off limits to economic and political activity. It claims that the business of business is business and that the concepts of justice and fairness have no place within it. The principles of justice, mercy and compassion are not applicable to economic activities, they say, and are deemed to be completely irrelevant. Unbridled greed and social irresponsibility have thus become the main driving force of the dominant culture. The result is that we have now been turned into veritable moral invalids. That is why wealthy nations have not even been able to muster the political will to comply with the minimal commitment to provide 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to help eradicate hunger and poverty from the world.

In order to stop polluting the environment, to stop being the irresponsible predators of nature that we have become and to love all our brothers and sisters without exception or exclusion, we urgently need to return to the values that are based on our faith and ethical and philosophical traditions.

We have openly rebelled against our mission to act as stewards of creation and arrogantly declared ourselves its proprietors, arrogating to ourselves the right to squander and abuse the marvels of nature. By being thus unfaithful to our most sacred values and principles, we have also endangered not only the survival of our own species, but also the very capacity of the Earth to sustain life.

In spite of all our current difficulties, our Earth is fortunate to have been blessed with the presence of a host of great spiritual prophets, saints and sages, who have offered their values to human society over the millennia. That divine wisdom, or faith-based values, are embodied in texts such as the Torah, the Bible, the Koran and the Vedas, in the noble teachings of Buddha, Lao Tzu and Confucius and in the wonderful beliefs and values of the indigenous peoples of all continents of our Earth. The great spiritual values espoused in those teachings can be seen as constituting the spiritual

assets of humankind. Today, we have gathered to acknowledge those values and recommit ourselves to respecting them.

Without the inclusion of those spiritual assets, not even the best planned programmes for the eradication of hunger and poverty in the world and for the attainment of peace on Earth can succeed. We need the inner strength — the moral energy and inspiration that we can get from our ethical values — to overcome our selfishness and individualism.

We have those powerful spiritual assets at our disposal. Unfortunately, we have opted to put them aside and decided instead to worship the golden calf, and we are now beginning to suffer the consequences of that infidelity to our deepest held beliefs and convictions.

The advantage is that we have an opportunity to integrate those values into the work of the United Nations, which can instil in us the moral strength and conviction that we need to take action capable of ensuring the success of our efforts to eradicate poverty, guarantee genuine human security for all, take seriously our commitments to human rights and become faithful stewards of our beleaguered planet.

To cite one example, the high-level Follow-up International Conference on Financing for Development to Review the Implementation of the Monterrey Consensus, which is to begin shortly in Doha, will be filled with references to improving human life and to the ideals of justice, peace, progress, freedom, cooperation, solidarity, tolerance and preferential treatment for the poor and vulnerable. Of course, those are principles that all beliefs and humanist ethical systems fully share.

I wish to encourage delegations to take advantage of that important Conference to join forces in a way that is consistent with the values that inspired our Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and to work together to make meaningful progress towards solutions to the most urgent issues on the agenda of the Doha Conference. The Conference offers us the opportunity to translate those values into action.

In the section of the agenda concerning the mobilization of domestic resources, the outcome document now being negotiated begins with a reference to the need for human beings to be at one and the same time the main beneficiaries of development

efforts and active participants in those efforts. It also refers to the need to elaborate appropriate policies in the fields of education, health, employment and social protection that are targeted to the poorest and most vulnerable sectors of the population, including women, children, the elderly and the disabled.

The agenda highlights the goal of decent work for all and the importance of building inclusive financial sectors and microfinance structures. There are also references to the goal of improving international cooperation in tax matters, since it has been determined that billions of dollars that could be used for development are lost annually due to the failure of individuals and corporations to pay taxes. I believe we can all agree that it is the social and legal duty of citizens to contribute to the common good.

Likewise, there are calls in the Doha document (TD/B(S-XXII)/2) for more vigorous efforts to combat corruption, a scourge that plagues societies both in the North and South, and to promote respect for the rule of law, human rights, inclusive democracy and good governance.

In the section dealing with international private capital flows, corporations investing in developing countries are reminded of their duty of corporate social responsibility and non-predatory practices, which they sometimes take seriously in the North, but not in the South. Similarly, in the section on international trade, all countries are held to their commitment to make the current round of multilateral trade negotiations a development round focused in particular on the needs of poorer countries.

In the section dealing with international official development assistance, donor countries are urged to respect the commitment they often reiterate to allocate at least 0.7 per cent of their gross domestic product to cooperation assistance to developing countries, a goal that is still far from being met. That should be seen as another essential moral duty of social justice, in other words, a way in which humankind as a whole could contribute to the common good. Those countries that have set targets to achieve that goal should accelerate their compliance and those that have not should do so.

There are calls for further exploration of various innovative sources of financing that may prove to be very useful in bringing us closer to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, complying with commitments to Africa's development needs and

adopting measures to deal with challenges such as climate change and the scarcity of food and energy.

In the section dealing with external debt, there is a proposal to identify more effective and just solutions to that distressing problem, which threatens to destroy the prospects for growth and development in so many countries of the South. Solutions that have been put in place so far have been found to be insufficient and selective. For example, they only target countries with very low per capita incomes and, unjustly, do not include so-called middle-income countries, where most of the world's poor people actually live.

Finally, in the so-called systemic issues section of the Doha document, there is a call for a thorough review and revamping of international financial structures and institutions, which are clearly not equipped to deal with the realities, problems and challenges of the twenty-first century. What is more, they do not adequately include developing countries in global economic governance and decision-making processes.

That appeal reflects a fundamental concept of justice, solidarity and representative democracy, which must be applied at the international level, just as it is so passionately defended at the national level. The ongoing financial crisis has now become one of the central issues to be addressed in the Doha Conference. For that reason, it should not escape our attention and our strong collective response as people of faith and as a testimony of our love of God and of our neighbours. Solidarity must be the star that guides us all to the peace that we must strive with our utmost commitment to attain.

May the compassionate, all-loving and merciful God enlighten our minds in our deliberations and strengthen our hearts so that, as people of faith and/or of deep ethical-philosophical convictions, we may rise to the occasion and take the courageous and heroic actions that are needed to save us from the grave consequences of the crises that threaten us all, rich and poor, from the North and from the South, although, as it has always been, the greatest threats are being faced by our dispossessed brothers and sisters throughout the world.

(spoke in Spanish)

I now give the floor to His Excellency Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon.

The Secretary-General: Thank you, Mr. President, for convening this high-level meeting to hold an interfaith dialogue. To His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, I say *asalamu alaykum*. I thank all participants for coming together for this high-level meeting. Their presence attests to the importance and urgency of dialogue in today's world. Saudi Arabia has taken a truly inspiring initiative for global harmony and mutual understanding. I thank the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, for his dynamic role in making this gathering possible.

We live in a wonderfully diverse global village. Globalization can be a great force for progress but, as economies merge, as cultural boundaries disappear and as new media bring our societies closer together than ever before, new fault lines can emerge. Indeed, we are seeing some troubling phenomena. Communal strife is intensifying. Extremist ideologies are on the rise. Societies are more polarized. Anti-Semitism remains a scourge. Islamophobia has emerged as a new term for an old and terrible form of prejudice. Other kinds of faith-based discrimination and racism show a dismaying consistency. Sometimes it seems as if none of history's awful lessons have been learned. One of the great challenges of our time must now surely be to ensure that our rich cultural diversity makes us more secure, not less.

Traditionally, peace has involved balancing the interests of different States, but we have learned that lasting peace requires more than a competitive equilibrium. For peace to endure, individuals, groups and nations must come to respect and understand each other. Interfaith initiatives are addressing that need with ever greater frequency and force. One of the most respected of those initiatives was the World Conference on Dialogue, held in Madrid this past July at the invitation of King Abdullah. That landmark meeting brought together followers of the world's religions, eminent scholars, intellectuals and others. Participants affirmed their belief in the fundamental equality of human beings irrespective of their colour, ethnicity, race, religion or culture. They also pledged to act within their spheres of influence to foster dialogue and cooperation.

We at the United Nations welcomed the Madrid Conference as a major contribution to our own longstanding efforts to promote tolerance and mutual

respect. That work derives from our founding Charter, from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights — the sixtieth anniversary of which we will mark next month — and from other groundbreaking human rights instruments.

It takes concrete form in the work of initiatives such as the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, which was established at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey. Over the past two years, the Alliance has been supporting grass-roots civil society projects that seek to bridge cultural divides by addressing entrenched stereotypes and polarization among communities. Those projects have involved exposing young people to other cultures and having experts provide opinions and advice on issues that threaten to inflame identity-based conflicts. The Alliance has also established a group of friends and intends to advance that work further still at the next forum, to be hosted by Turkey in April next year.

Many other Member States have put forward initiatives: Iran, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, the Philippines, Russia and others. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has been striving to promote intercultural understanding since its very founding. The Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace is helping Governments, civil society and United Nations agencies to share ideas. Those efforts complement each other and advance the cause. They are showing that there is no corner of the world that cannot benefit from an active, targeted approach to promoting cross-cultural contacts and education. The call to dialogue is striking a chord.

But we cannot be satisfied with declarations of intent and commonality, important as those are. What we need is dialogue that delivers. We need new partnerships that will continue after the last representative has gone home. For that to work, we need to involve everyone: Government officials, grass-roots groups, chief executive officers, philanthropists, academics and the media. We especially need the world's young people. By virtue of their youth, prejudice may not be as ingrained; in a sense, they may have less to unlearn. They are well placed to approach the unfamiliar — people, customs and ideas — with open minds.

Living together in peace has proved tragically difficult. We must try harder to bring shared values to life. With knowledge and leadership, we can live up to

the best of our traditions and ensure human dignity for all. As we move ahead, let us be guided by the words of the great international civil servant Ralph Bunche. It was 1949. He was in the midst of the peace efforts for which he won the Nobel Prize for Peace. At a particularly trying moment, he said the following:

“I have a deep-seated bias against hate and intolerance. I have a bias against racial and religious bigotry. I have a bias against war and a bias for peace. I have a bias that leads me to believe in the essential goodness of my fellow men, which leads me to believe that no problem of human relations is ever insoluble”.

That is the only bias we can tolerate.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I thank the Secretary-General for his statement.

Allow me now to draw the Assembly's attention to some organizational matters pertaining to the conduct of the meeting.

I should first like to refer to the length of statements. In order to accommodate all the speakers inscribed on the list, I urge speakers to limit their statements to no more than 15 minutes, on the understanding that that would not preclude the distribution of more extensive texts. I appeal to speakers to cooperate in that respect. In the light of that given time frame, I would like to appeal to speakers to deliver their statements at a normal speed so that interpretation may be provided properly.

To assist speakers in managing their time, a light system has been installed at the speaker's rostrum that functions as follows. A green light will be activated at the start of a speaker's statement. An orange light will be activated 30 seconds before the end of the 15 minutes. A red light will be activated when the 15 minute limit has elapsed. Furthermore, in order to avoid disruption for the speakers, I ask representatives to remain in their seats after a statement has been delivered.

**Address by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques
King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Head of State of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, 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 Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

King Abdullah (*spoke in Arabic*): In the presence of this gathering of world leaders and representatives and members of the General Assembly — the conscience of the United Nations — and before the whole world, we state with a unified voice that religions, through which Almighty God sought to bring happiness to humankind, should not be instruments that cause misery. Human beings were created as equals and partners on the planet; either they live together in peace and harmony or they will inevitably be consumed by the flames of misunderstanding, malice and hatred.

Throughout history, preoccupation with differences between the followers of religions and cultures has engendered intolerance and bigotry, causing devastating wars and considerable bloodshed, without any sound logical or ideological justification. It is indeed high time for us to learn from the harsh lessons of the past and concur on the ethics and lofty ideals in which we all believe. Matters on which we differ will be decided by our omniscient Creator on the Day of Judgment. 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.

Terrorism and crime are the enemies of God and of every religion and civilization. They would not have appeared except for the absence of the principle of tolerance, the sense of alienation that has affected the lives of many of our young people, leading them to drugs and crime, and the dissolution of family bonds that the Almighty God had intended to be firm and strong. 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.

I wish to thank His Excellency the President of the General Assembly for convening this meeting. I am also grateful to my friends, world leaders from East and West, for attending this meeting. I am indeed proud of their friendship and their participation. On this occasion, permit me to call on the participants in the Madrid Dialogue to elect a committee to represent them and to undertake the task of guiding this dialogue in the coming days and years. I can assure them and all the States of the world and their peoples that our concern for this dialogue stems from our Islamic faith and values, our compassion and care for the human condition, in order to save humanity from its miseries. We will continue what we have begun, extending our hand to all those advocating amity, peace, justice and tolerance.

In conclusion, I would like to recall some words from the Holy Koran:

“O mankind! We have created you from a single pair of a male and female, and made you into nations and tribes, so that ye may know each other. Verily, the most honoured of you in the sight of God is he who is the most righteous of you.” (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*)

May peace and mercy and the blessings of God be with you.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, for the statement he has just made.

His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by Her Excellency Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines.

Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines, 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 Her Excellency Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Arroyo: Thank you, Mr. President for convening this high-level meeting of the General Assembly. My congratulations go to His Majesty the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for drawing attention to the World Conference on Dialogue held in Madrid last July. At that Conference, Their Majesties the King of Saudi Arabia and the King of Spain brought together Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and representatives of other religions in the hope of promoting understanding and tolerance among followers of the world's faiths. That is also the hope for this meeting here in New York.

The Philippines fully supports this initiative because we take a great interest in promoting world peace and in encouraging greater cross-religion exchange. Allow me at the outset to introduce draft resolution A/63/L.24 entitled "Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace", tabled jointly by the Philippines and Pakistan and co-sponsored by approximately 60 States. This draft resolution emerged as a consensus text after a series of consultations. Among the salient points of the draft resolution is the affirmation that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute an important part of the alliance of civilizations and of the culture of peace.

The draft resolution encourages the promotion of dialogue through the media in all cultures and civilizations. It emphasizes that everyone has the right to freedom of expression. It also affirms that the exercise of this right carries with it duties and responsibilities necessary to respect the rights or reputations of others and to protect national security, public order, public health or morals. The draft resolution requests the proclamation of a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. I commend the draft resolution for adoption at the close of our plenary meeting tomorrow. This will demonstrate once again our solidarity for the

promotion of interfaith dialogue as a powerful aid to ensure durable peace worldwide.

The draft resolution is especially relevant to the United Nations under the leadership of His Excellency Ban Ki-Moon because, for the first time in the United Nations' history, the Secretary-General has issued a report on interreligious and intercultural activities. Likewise, UNESCO is working on interreligious dialogue.

Regrettably, the story of faith has too often been twisted into a source of despair and destruction among peoples and nations. There are those who wish to instigate religious wars. There are those who use faith to divide rather than unite people. They camouflage their evil designs by invoking religious prejudice in the hope of heightening a clash of civilizations. In this era of propaganda on the clash of civilizations, it is especially important that we pursue broader interfaith dialogue to promote solidarity. Our challenge is to redeem the true meaning of our faith, if we are to bring true peace and prosperity to the world. We must make this challenge an opportunity to forge religious understanding. But we must not mistake tolerance and understanding of other faiths and belief systems as a blank check allowing abuse in the form of violence cloaked in religion, which is completely unacceptable.

The Philippines has actively advocated interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue is an official policy of the Philippine Government. It is also a historical truth among our diverse peoples and beliefs. Faith is ingrained in the lives of our people. It is the primordial seed of humanity. It offers hope, confidence, courage and commitment to make a better global neighbourhood.

As we integrate interfaith understanding in development policy, it becomes more effective in resolving conflict. Our archipelago of more than 7,000 islands has had its share of religious strife, ethnic tension and violence. For years we have worked to achieve peace in Mindanao in the southern Philippines. The peace process was recently dealt a setback by violence carried out by lawless renegade elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. But we are fully committed to the peace process. There is no alternative to peace. We are working to make as much progress as possible on peace within the parameters set out by authentic dialogues with communities. However, before we can actively and effectively reactivate the

peace process again in earnest, we must first bring stability back to the island, restore order and be able to trust that responsible elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front have regained control.

Religious leaders can speed up dialogue and reconciliation. They are our partners in the peacemaking process. The historic divide between Christians and Muslims in our country is narrowing dramatically. That is in no small part due to our focus on interfaith dialogue and a willingness to accept the sincerity of those who differ with us in faith.

The Bishops-Ulama Conference is our format for interfaith dialogue. It is a movement of Catholic and Christian bishops and Muslim ulamas organized to promote mutual understanding of faiths and religions for peace.

We all want to see peace and prosperity in the Philippines. Through interfaith dialogue, under the leadership of the Bishops-Ulama Conference, through global engagement, with the largest possible international involvement, including the United Nations, Saudi Arabia, Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia and others in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Spain, Sweden and the European Union, the United States, Japan, Australia and other bilateral official development assistance partners, and through economic assistance at the community level, we are confident that peace will happen.

Three years ago, we had the honour of chairing the first Informal Summit of Leaders on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace here in the United Nations.

At the regional level, we are one of the conveners of an ongoing series of Asia-Pacific interfaith dialogues that began in Indonesia in 2004. Subsequent dialogues were held in the Philippines in 2006, New Zealand in 2007 and Cambodia in 2008.

Currently, we are preparing to host the Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development, scheduled for May 2009.

Our participation today in this initiative on the culture of peace advances our relationship with Middle Eastern and Islamic nations. Their support in carrying out our interfaith dialogues has been critical to our progress in promoting peace in the southern Philippines. What we are doing together here today and

tomorrow is every bit as powerful as bullets, military tanks and armaments to fight those who bring misery and violence to people at home or across the globe. We must follow our faith and have faith in each other if we are to truly lift up the poor, transform war into peace and stamp out the intolerance and hatred wrought by a false reading of the divine message.

We maintain high hopes in interfaith dialogue as a means for building bridges to replace barriers between communities of different cultures and ethnicity. We are here today united by our faith and determined to bridge the valley that unnecessarily divides us, whether we live across the street, across rivers or across oceans and continents from each other. We can and must bridge the divide through the alliance of civilizations so that we can advance the common good of humanity.

Let us embrace the power of dialogue here today and tomorrow for peace, development and human dignity. Let us adopt draft resolution A/63/L.24/Rev.1 on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace.

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

Mrs. Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, President of the Republic of the Philippines, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly with now hear an address by the Amir of the State of Kuwait.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, 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 Highness Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

Sheikh Al-Sabah (*spoke in Arabic*): I thank the Almighty God that we are all assembled here in this Hall. We came to foster peace and the good of

humanity, to consolidate the links between us through dialogue and understanding, to focus on the values and bonds that join us and to reject the misgivings and suspicions that separate us.

I congratulate you, Mr. President, on the occasion of this high-level meeting and wish you every success in conducting its deliberations. It is also my pleasure to recognize in particular my brother, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, the King of the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for his initiative to hold this high-level meeting in the General Assembly, which was originally established to embrace and consolidate dialogue as an enduring principle of international relations, seeking to achieve peace and build bridges of cooperation and interconnection between nations and peoples. We therefore convey to His Majesty our most heartfelt thanks and appreciation for his gracious and continued efforts in this field, wishing him success in his endeavours, which have our full support.

We also value the good results of the World Conference on Dialogue, which was held this past July in Spain under the auspices of — and thanks to the gracious efforts of — the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, and His Majesty King Juan Carlos I of Spain.

I must also extend my thanks to His Excellency the Secretary-General and to the United Nations specialized agencies for espousing the noble goals of dialogue, consolidating peace among peoples, promoting programmes and paving the way to create a world that renounces fanaticism and promotes moderation, fuses our roots and melts differences, eliminates obstacles and opens horizons, magnifies commonalities between peoples and removes impediments through cooperation.

Our world today is facing difficult circumstances, as problems have intensified, and diversified, and solutions have become complex and difficult to implement. The inability to resolve political issues in numerous areas of the world has led to the emergence of new conflicts and civil wars, and pressing economic crises have become entangled with deadly natural disasters.

New phenomena have emerged and intensified, such as terrorism, drugs and discrimination. The spirit of fanaticism and hatred has become widespread. Feelings of hatred and exclusion have inflamed the

followers of religious, cultural and political groups and their symbols, principles and values have been vilified.

Regrettably, all those phenomena have shaken the foundations of global stability. As leaders and peoples, therefore, we must assume our historical responsibility to carefully examine our painful reality through a serious and sincere dialogue among peoples, religions and cultures. We should therefore focus our efforts on strengthening genuine religious and moral values and on the commonly held just principles that all religions espouse and on which all cultures are based, so as to establish a point of departure from which we can join together for the common good to foster cooperation and peace. Today, more than ever before, both conceptually and in reality, we must transform the world from a culture of hatred, fanaticism and war to one of dialogue and coexistence. The way to achieve that is by interacting positively with one another without fear, for we have all been entrusted with the destiny of humankind for the benefit of all beings.

Perhaps a good way to achieve that is by participating in the dialogue between intellectual leaders of the followers of the divine religions and other beliefs, since dialogue has now become part of the political environment. The United Nations, for example, has made a contribution to the establishment of an appropriate atmosphere through the General Assembly's adoption of resolution 53/22, which proclaimed 2001 as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations in order to counter hatred and incitement to violence and conflicts. To that end as well, the General Assembly adopted resolution 62/90, which proclaimed 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures.

A sound analysis of the tragedies that humankind has endured reveals that in no instance were those events the result of religious beliefs or cultural values; rather, they were caused by extremism, fanaticism and discrimination on the part of some followers of the divine religions and other beliefs. Instead of being the cause of problems, the essence, methods and teachings of the divine religions provide solutions to the problems faced by humankind. It is therefore incumbent upon clergy and educated people of all religious faiths to highlight those facts and to help correct misconceptions in the minds of those who espouse extremism, fanaticism and discrimination.

Moreover, intellectuals and educators must raise awareness among young people and inculcate in them respect for the divine religions. They must also instil in them the spirit and value of moderation and tolerance, as well as to promote positive interaction between the various religions and beliefs. In addition, the media, which shape the intellect and feed the mind, must address these subjects in a positive manner and recognize the scope of their influence in forming enlightened and fair opinions that affirm the interconnection between, and the oneness of, all human beings.

As leaders and peoples, we are aware of our historical responsibility to combat extremism and discrimination, promote moderation and avoid extremism. That is certainly no easy task, yet it is a necessary undertaking. We in Kuwait have made numerous contributions and have established programmes and undertaken other efforts towards that end. Kuwait established an international centre for moderation that has convened numerous intellectual conferences, including the two international meetings held in London and Washington over the past two years. The relevant Government agencies have also established programmes and held seminars targeting all sectors of society that have helped to raise awareness about moderation among the population.

Kuwait has also sponsored and convened many regional and international conferences and seminars on moderation in Islam. We are encouraging religious tolerance among peoples and respect for the beliefs of the followers of other divine religions, while safeguarding their dignity and avoiding offending their symbols. We have also opposed the use of religious beliefs as a basis for discrimination in society and have called for respect for the different characteristics of peoples and for their right to equality and coexistence. All this is at the heart of the relationship between human beings and achieving it is the highest purpose of all religions and cultures.

The best outcome to our well-intended gathering in this Hall would be a joint international commitment to respect all religions and to avoid damaging, interfering with or ridiculing their symbols, while endeavouring to deter such acts and those who advocate them. We must also commit to ban efforts that seek to deepen discord among religions and undermine the chances of coexistence among human beings. We must commit to encourage and finance programmes

that promote the spread of the culture of tolerance and understanding through dialogue, so as to establish a framework for international relations through conferences and seminars, and develop educational, cultural and information programmes to achieve those goals.

The best way for me to end my statement before the Assembly is to quote the words of Allah the Almighty as he commands us:

“O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other. Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you” (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*).

That is our course, our objective and our ambition, as well as our message to the entire world.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I thank the Amir of the State of Kuwait for the statement he has just made.

Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah, Amir of the State of Kuwait, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the President of the State of Israel.

Mr. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel, 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. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Peres: Earlier this week, we commemorated the passing of 13 years since the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, my friend and partner in our journey, who was murdered while singing a song of peace. Assassins may take a life, but they cannot kill a dream. That fateful night at the square, we stood together and sang of peace, which has been the aspiration of my people for generation upon generation. Then came three shots.

However, we were not alone in our despair. Many around the world who cherished Rabin's vision came to stand at our side and share our grief. Arab and Muslim leaders came, which we very much appreciated. At the time, it felt like sorrow had shattered barriers. Tragedy had united sons and daughters of all religions. Our shared agony shed light on our shared hopes, our hunger for fraternity and the dream of peace that we nurtured in our hearts.

In our region, children bear the names of prophets who are sacred to us all. Why should Avraham and Abraham and Ibrahim grow up as adversaries in animosity? Why should Moses, Moshe and Musa live that way? As our prophets asked,

"Have we not all one father? Hath not one God created us? Why do we deal deceitfully, every man against his brother, by profaning the covenant of our fathers?" (*The Holy Bible, Malachi 2:10*)

Abraham said to his nephew Lot,

"Please let there be no strife between me and you, and between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are kinsmen." (*Genesis 13:8*)

That was the first call for peace among brothers in history. Brotherly relations should not involve violence and domination. We all worship the same Lord in Heaven. Religion carries the word of God to man, as is written in Psalms:

"What man is he that desires life and loves many days, that he may see good?" (*Psalms 34:12*)

"Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it." (*Psalms 34:14*)

Religious belief requires that we recognize the eternal message that all men were created in God's image. Harming a human being is tantamount to harming God himself. When nuclear weapons, long-range missiles, indiscriminate terror and fanatical incitement determine the agenda, all of us have to change that agenda.

The Jewish and Arab national revivals occurred at almost the same time and on almost the same piece of land. They occurred rapidly and in a land that was small. However, after the First World War, a window of opportunity was opened when Emir Feisal and President Weizmann aspired to create a new environment. They met 89 years ago, in November

1919, to announce an understanding between two peoples from the same cradle who could have lived under the shadow of the same trees — the old olives and tall dates. Their declaration states in part:

"mindful of the racial kinship and ancient bonds existing between the Arabs and the Jewish people, and realizing that the surest means of working out the consummation of their natural aspirations is through the closest possible collaboration".

That was great statesmanship and timely wisdom. Alas, we did not take heed of it. Instead, we confronted one another, abandoning faith for greed and forging swords instead of peace. They tore apart the land and increased hostility, resulting in a region of barriers and walls that rose higher and higher and destroying any bridges that may have been built. Hundreds of thousands of men and women from all sides lost their lives; many were incurably injured; others lost their homes and became refugees. Fortunes were wasted on the purchase, maintenance and replacement of weapons that inevitably became obsolete. Resources were spent on sustaining hostility instead of advancing life. There can be no consolation for the bereaved families or the orphaned children, other than the end of violence and bloodshed.

There is an Arab proverb that states that there are three events that cannot be reversed: an arrow released from its bow, a word that has escaped one's mouth and a bullet that splits the heart. Alas, we cannot change the past; however, we can build and shape a new future. That seems more feasible today in the light of the Saudi proposal that evolved into the Arab Peace Initiative.

I listened to the statement of His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia. I hope that his voice will become the prevailing voice of the whole region and all people. It is right. It is needed. It is promising. The Initiative's portrayal of our region's future provides hope to the people and inspires confidence in the nations. Yes, in order to change the world we have to change ourselves.

The Arab Peace Initiative states that "a military solution to the conflict will not achieve peace or provide security for the parties". Israel agrees with that assumption. The Initiative continues by saying that "just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East is the strategic option of the Arab countries". That is also

the strategic option of Israel. The Initiative states that the goals are to “consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended ... enter into a peace agreement with Israel and provide security for all the States of the region”, as well as to “establish normal relations with Israel in the context of comprehensive peace” and “stop the further shedding of blood, enabling the Arab countries and Israel to live in peace and good-neighbourliness and provide future generations with security, stability and prosperity”.

Those expressions in the Arab Peace Initiative are inspirational and promising; they represent a serious opening for what may become real progress and a great reality.

A comprehensive regional peace requires the completion of the bilateral negotiations with the Palestinians and the sharing of the painful cost. Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, who is conducting those negotiations and who has just returned from Sharm el-Sheikh, has said that we are going to continue to negotiate despite the Israeli elections. We are ready for that, as we have proved many times in the past.

Thirty years ago we signed the peace accords with Egypt. Fifteen years ago we undertook the Oslo initiative with the Palestinians. Fourteen years ago we achieved peace with the Kingdom of Jordan. Nine years ago we withdrew completely from Lebanon. Three years ago we evacuated Gaza completely and willingly dismantled all our settlements there; it was not simple. Today we are making progress in the negotiations with the Palestinians. We are exploring the possibility of real peace with the Syrians, who are last on the list of historic conflicts.

However, there are those in our region who sow hatred and try to widen the abyss and erect barriers; those who seek to wipe out other people and encourage killing, as though they were gods. In order to stand up against those who instigate discord and violence, we must bear the flag of brotherhood and peace. That will be a beacon for a world in trouble. It will end many conflicts and offer a comprehensive peace for all people — real freedom without domination or occupation; global economic cooperation and cultural relations — a new vision for the entire region.

I know that it is harder to pursue peace than to wage war. Building is more difficult than destruction. Yet, it is my life experience that it is worthwhile to strive for peace, build homes and respect human life.

That is the proper biography for men of goodwill. For the sake of our children, let us break the bonds of hostility that stem from the past. When the world faces a serious crisis, let us offer a new remedy to overcome old maladies. The global crisis worries us just as our crisis worries the world. However, we can adopt a position acceptable to the entire world that does not erase our national identities but offers global opportunities for all of us.

This meeting of religious leaders can produce a movement of profound significance, one that will bear great responsibility. If we call on believers to serve peace in every nation for all nations, for every person and for all peoples, the bridges we build will render the barriers useless. Let us free the world from the perception that an irrevocable curse of darkness hangs in the skies of the Middle East. Our shared history has known golden ages during which we — Arabs, Jews and Christians — lived as friends and brothers.

Interfaith dialogue will elevate our spirits, bring a breath of fresh air to our peoples today and live on in posterity. Let us renew our faith in one God, in a God of values and respect for human life. That is the duty and responsibility of all States and religious leaders. Let us not recoil from difficulty. We must not hesitate when faced with risks. Working for peace will justify our prayers and bring a new sense of purpose to our lives. It will demonstrate our values to our children, all values to all children. Peace is not just a goal. It was a promise made to us at the dawn of time and at the pinnacle of the holiest mountains. Let us climb together to those mountains and breathe fresh air in a new landscape.

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

Mr. Shimon Peres, President of the State of Israel, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, 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 Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

King Abdullah (*spoke in Arabic*): The most appropriate way to begin my speech would be to cite the words of God Almighty:

“Call to the way of your Lord with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and have disputations with them in the best manner; surely your Lord best knows those who go astray from His path, and He knows best those who follow the right way”. (*The Holy Koran, XVI:125*)

Allow me to express my deep gratitude and appreciation to my brother the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for his initiative to convene this international conference that seeks to promote the cause of interreligious and intercultural dialogue on a well-charted scientific basis devoid of fanaticism and isolationism and guided by a spirit of toleration and acceptance of the other. The course he advocates calls for highlighting the common denominators among civilizations and the followers of world religions and for mutual recognition of the role of each culture and religion in enriching human civilization and in realizing the common good of humankind throughout the ages.

My brother, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, began this process by breaking down barriers among the followers of world religions, first with his landmark meeting with His Holiness the Pope and then by convening the Mecca and Madrid conferences. The dialogue he launched continues today with the convening of this international conference, which brings together adherents of different faiths and cultures in order to forge rapprochement, understanding and tolerance among them.

The high status, respect and appreciation Saudi Arabia enjoys, especially in the Muslim world, enable the Kingdom to lead this dialogue and will facilitate its success at a time when Islam is being subjected to many injustices, and accusations arising from the ignorance of some about this religion. Islam calls for moderation and tolerance and eschews extremism, violence and bigotry.

Since many of the participants and observers in this meeting are non-Arabic speakers, please allow me to continue in English.

(*spoke in English*)

My friends, in our time, we are urgently called to the way of peace. Throughout the world, understanding and trust among peoples of different faiths and cultures have been eroded. This is especially apparent among adherents of the three monotheistic faiths, who make up more than half of the global population. Misinformation and stereotypes, created by a few, are increasingly shaping perceptions of the other and creating fears, suspicions and even hatred.

To reverse the tide of resentment and fear, communication is vital. There must be a new and global dialogue among people of different faiths and civilizations. Such a dialogue is essential to reveal the commonalities that unite humanity, but it does more. It teaches people to respect their differences; it opens eyes and hearts to the beauty of diversity; it helps disentangle fact from fiction; and it exposes the fraudulence of extremist teachings.

In Jordan, we have made interfaith dialogue and understanding a priority. The Amman Message is an explanation of the true nature of Islam and a call to peaceful coexistence among all human beings. It has been supported by more than 500 of the world's leading Muslim scholars from all eight schools of Islamic jurisprudence. It has been endorsed by the Organization of the Islamic Conference, representing Muslim countries the world over. Jordan is proud to continue this work, including support for other global initiatives. One such initiative is “A Common Word”, an overture from Muslim scholars to their Christian counterparts, declaring the common ground between Christianity and Islam.

In all this work, we seek to advance a global dialogue that can help redirect the course of our future away from hostilities and towards peace. This summit shows that support for such dialogue has become a priority at the highest levels. Now, together, we must make it our common task to move the discussions forward, out of the conference rooms and into the world's homes, schools, offices and lives.

It is impossible to talk about interfaith harmony, especially between East and West, without also discussing conflict resolution in the Middle East. The

conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is the core conflict in our region. It is a political conflict and it demands a just, negotiated solution that brings statehood and freedom for Palestinians and security and more regional acceptance for Israel. For with every day that justice is denied to Palestinians, with every day that the occupation prevents a positive future, the regional and global impact grows. Resentment and frustration are felt throughout the region and, indeed, throughout the world. Millions of people, especially young people, question whether the West means what it says about equality, respect and universal justice. Meanwhile, extremists — Muslim, Christian and Jewish — are thriving on the doubts and divisions.

My friends, I can think of no more effective way to ease East-West and interfaith tensions than to end that divisive conflict with a peace based on our deep, shared values: justice, respect for international law and the right of all people to live in dignity.

As we move forward with tangible solutions to that and other regional conflicts, we must also make tangible strides in communication. That means a sustainable, institutional effort to spread tolerance and acceptance through practical initiatives across the globe. Young people are vital to success. I hope that from this summit we will launch student exchanges and joint university projects to bring young people together and show them that what humanity has in common is far greater than what separates us. I also hope that we can encourage leadership from the world's media, large and small. No group is in a better position to get the truth out — on every continent — that people of different faiths can live in peace and harmony, and that when we do so, we are more equipped to face the challenges. Only together will we realize the prosperous future all of us seek.

This milestone gathering is not the end but the beginning of our journey. The participation of all present has helped us take a giant step forward on the path to global peace and acceptance. It is now up to all of us to walk the path that takes us to our goal.

Dialogue among civilizations is not a luxury; it is a necessity. Indeed, it is a duty that we must all fulfil if we are to end the growing tensions that threaten global stability. Today, everywhere in the world — the Americas, Europe, the Middle East, Africa, Asia — people of faith and goodwill are coming together. I pledge to this Assembly that Jordan will be by its side,

a full partner, at every step of the way. Let us together dare to shape a new future — a future free from injustice, free from hatred and free from cultural misconceptions. May God bless you and reward your efforts.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): On behalf of the General Assembly, I wish to thank His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, for the statement he has just made.

His Majesty King Abdullah II bin Al Hussein, Head of State of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland.

Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland, 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 Her Excellency Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland, and to invite her to address the Assembly.

President Halonen: I am honoured to attend this high-level meeting convened by the United Nations and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. On behalf of Finland, I welcome the initiative of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, to widen and deepen the dialogue among cultures, religions and faiths.

I have come here with an open mind in the spirit of peace. With the advent of globalization, the importance of national borders has decreased. Globalization has brought about more human contact and today different people, cultures, civilizations and faiths encounter each other every day. People have different opinions and beliefs. Increased interaction can promote understanding among people but it can also strengthen prejudices and stereotypes. Attention is needed from all of us. Therefore it is only appropriate that we meet on theme “Culture of Peace” here at the United Nations.

After the shocking events of 11 September 2001, I initiated discussions with Christian, Jewish and Islamic religious groups in Finland. Since then, I have seen and felt how these people who belong to different religions and cultures have, by respecting one another, acted as a unifying factor and resource in our society. I am very sincerely grateful to them for this work. I hope that similar constructive phenomena have been experienced elsewhere as well. The political leaders of a country cannot take the whole responsibility but encouragement and guidance are needed.

How to analyse the situation and solve conflicts is important in the whole of society, including homes, schools and work places. Peacebuilding is needed always and everywhere. During its history, Finland has been involved in wars and conflicts like most European countries. During the Finnish presidency of the European Union in 2006, on our initiative, a network of voluntary cooperation on intercultural and interreligious issues was established. In the network, representatives of European Union organs and member States have worked on new ways and means to cultivate good relations among cultures and religions. This challenging work continues.

One of the basic and most comprehensive sources of human rights is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, written and approved by consensus at the United Nations in 1948. In the coming days, we will celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration. It emphasizes human dignity and equality and establishes a solid basis for dialogue between various cultures and civilizations. My own country, Finland, is committed to the universal values, rights and freedoms enshrined in the Declaration. But for us, it is also a declaration of responsibilities. It is our responsibility to respect and observe universal human rights in full and everywhere. The Declaration proclaims equal and universal human rights for all humans: men and women; believers and non-believers. It has been and is still a great source of inspiration to combat discrimination and marginalization everywhere.

The dispute between Israel and the Palestinians is often mentioned as a key issue, symbolizing the breach between the West and the Muslim world. Finland welcomes and supports serious initiatives to solve this dispute. It is generally acknowledged that any solution must be based on a two-State model and on reaching agreement on the status of Palestinian refugees and on Jerusalem. Nevertheless, there is no instant formula for

peace. Finding a solution requires negotiations and we all know that these are always influenced by national and international political situations. Reaching a negotiated solution requires political will and courage, above all on the part of the Israelis and the Palestinians. Our countries and organizations should above all support the negotiations and refrain from doing anything that hinders them. Any agreement reached between Israel and the Palestinians must also be accepted by everyone else.

This meeting stresses the importance of the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue in today's multicultural and multi-faith world. We hope that this meeting can serve as a source of inspiration for people, religious communities, civil society and authorities on all levels to engage in interreligious dialogue. We are invited to move into a new era of respect for a variety of convictions. We are challenged to recognize the universal spiritual and human values of the religions that have shaped our common world. We have to do our part today in order to provide for a better world for generations to come.

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

Ms. Tarja Halonen, President of the Republic of Finland, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by His Excellency Mr. Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by His Excellency Mr. Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic.

Mr. Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic, 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. Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Sleiman (*spoke in Arabic*): We meet once again at the United Nations General Assembly on agenda item 45, entitled "Culture of peace", in order to promote dialogue and cooperation among people of

different cultures and followers of various religions. We are also here to highlight our interest, as an international community, in developing mutual understanding within the realms of knowledge, interaction and respect on the basis of justice, rightness and equality.

Convened by the President of the General Assembly, our meeting today bears particular importance because it is being held at such a high level in response to an initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia who, last July in Madrid, launched a process of dialogue, cooperation and solidarity that was attended by many people in a desire to chart a path towards achieving common, human purposes and establishing relationships of tolerance, mutual acceptance and respect for religious and cultural differences and specificities.

Our common interest in the invitation to dialogue and the commitment to its outcome is compounded by the prevailing critical circumstances in inter- and intra-State relations which has grown because of fears and concerns over manifestations of sectarian and ethnic violence, terrorism and intimidation, coercion and defamation, disrespect and abuse of dignity.

As a result, the international community has chosen to place religious and cultural differences in their proper context and to encourage understanding, not as a luxury, limited to one or other cultural group, but as a crucial problem that concerns us all and that must be without hesitation in an urgent manner.

We must have a true dialogue, one of hearts and minds, so as to establish relations among different cultures and religions based on mutual awareness of common denominators as well as recognition of differences and particularities.

At the same time, impulsive resort to dialogue to resolve existing or potential conflicts will not yield results unless it is based on a long, cumulative process that has diligently and regularly integrates relations of trust and openness towards one another. We should be committed to our ideas, convictions and practices in a spirit of genuine dialogue based on justice.

Within the context of such a process lies the importance of the cultural, educational and media efforts that should accompany the dialogue, launched or supported by the United Nations and its specialized

agencies. These agencies include UNESCO and the bodies that the Madrid World Conference on Dialogue created and to which participants committed themselves.

In spite of this, the effectiveness of this dialogue remains subject to the dynamics of asymmetric power relations. Furthermore, continuation of control, oppression and arbitrariness puts the credibility of any dialogue to a critical test. This is primarily true in our Arab Levant and the Holy Lands.

For how could any dialogue progress and flourish when Israeli occupation of Palestinian and Arab territories persist, when the national and human rights of the Palestinian people are systematically violated, including the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their territories and homeland, and when attempts to impose a resettlement of Palestinian refugees in other countries continue.

Such a reality is in contravention of United Nations resolutions that have brought us here today and with the spirit of justice which must embrace the dialogue that we have been convened here to discuss.

Therefore, Jerusalem, the city of peace, where believers in the monotheistic religions come together, would not realize its historic mission unless the injustice imposed on its sons and on the Palestinian people as a whole is redressed and the occupation is ended.

It is no secret to those who like and know Lebanon — and they are quite numerous — that our country embodies unique characteristics that have withstood ordeals that tested our will to live together in one country, rich in its diversity, solid in its Arab identity and interacting with world cultures.

These characteristics, in addition to our deeply rooted experience in our modern history that combines unity and diversity, freedom and mutual respect, deep-rooted traditions and modernity, that have made Lebanon a place of meeting and openness. Indeed, these attributes qualify Lebanon to be the widest and richest space for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, serving both Arab and Islamic worlds and the interests of the world at large.

In my statement before the General Assembly last September (see A/63/PV.6), I had the opportunity to state that the philosophy of the Lebanese entity is based on dialogue, harmony and coexistence. I

emphasized our ambition to see Lebanon become an international centre for the management of the dialogue of civilizations and cultures and, consequently, a global laboratory for this universal dialogue. This would be especially appropriate given the fact that article 9 of the Lebanese Constitution stipulates that freedom of belief in Lebanon shall be absolute and that the State shall respect all religions and sects and ensure the exercise of religious rights under its protection.

Lebanon is not merely a country. It is, rather, an example of a message of freedom, a model of pluralism and a space for dialogue and coexistence of different cultures and religions. As was stated by His Holiness, Pope John Paul II, and confirmed by His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI, Lebanon is a necessity both for the East and the West and thus deserves the full support and endorsement of the international community.

Felt at many levels, such support can only be promoted by achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East based on the resolutions of the United Nations and the Arab Peace Initiative in its entirety and in accordance with the spirit of justice that constitutes the essence of religions.

We gather here today to restate our rejection of the clash of ignorance and to emphasize our will to work together in the fields of ethics, culture, politics and peaceful international relations. The gathering of this body here today, with all its symbolism, prompts us to remember together the strong link that exists between our approach to and culture of dialogue and our commitment to the United Nations Charter.

Such an invitation reminds me of what binds Lebanon to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in whose drafting it participated, and to this Organization that stood by my country in defending its freedom, independence, sovereignty and stability so that it would remain a country true to itself and a witness to the richness promised by the meeting of religions and intercultural dialogue that is based on respect for the principles and values that aspire to the good of all mankind.

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

Mr. Michel Sleiman, President of the Lebanese Republic, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan

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

Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, 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. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and to invite him to address the Assembly.

President Karzai: I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this high-level meeting on the culture of peace, one of the most pertinent issues of our time. Most of all, allow me to thank the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, for his dedication to the cause of interfaith dialogue and for initiating this event. There is nothing more important than the elimination of the scourge of extremism, xenophobia and hatred, which can be possible only through dialogue and cooperation.

We are meeting here today to affirm that all religions in our world reflect and nurture mankind's inner desire for peace and self-realization. Despite our different faiths, peoples of various religions have lived together in peace and harmony all over the world. Where there has been conflict or confrontation, it has stemmed not from religion, but from the pursuit of narrow political objectives by certain individuals, many religions and political ideologies.

Sadly, our understanding of each other is sometimes marred by misconceptions, particularly with regard to such phenomena as bigotry, extremism and terrorism and to whether they are rooted in our religious convictions. Many associate terrorism with religion, others give that association credence by describing it as a reaction of the East against the West, and all fail to grasp the phenomenon in its real nature.

Nothing could be further removed from a plausible causal connection with terrorism than

religion. The terrorism we know is political rather than religious. The terrorism we know is the historical product of bad politics and the reckless pursuit of narrowly defined interests.

These are not textbook observations. I have the history of my country to illustrate my view. Terrorism has never been a religious phenomenon in Afghanistan. Indeed, terrorism there is an international and regional phenomenon, rooted in a complex historical context, spanning the past four decades. The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the subsequent misuse of religion for political objectives and the deliberate promotion and utilization of extremism as a bulwark against the Soviet threat are important factors that have collectively produced the phenomenon of terrorism we are facing as an enemy today. Al-Qaida and other terrorist networks, as we know them today, are residues of a reckless past that we must rectify.

Therefore, religion is not the source of terrorism. The term "Islamic terrorism", which is frequently used to describe acts of brutality and violence, is fundamentally misleading. Not only does Islam, a religion of peace and moderation, condemn unequivocally any act that violates the life and property of an innocent individual, but the Holy Koran has, in fact, equated murdering an innocent person with the killing of all of humanity. Far from being complicit with terror, Muslims have actually been among the most afflicted victims of international terrorism.

Today, if the world is to rectify the failings of the past and reverse the threats against peace and coexistence, dialogue, understanding and mutual acceptance are the way forward. At the same time, we must also counter the few discordant voices that preach hatred and division and misuse the name of religion to mask their pursuit of political, rather than religious, goals. We must ensure that the voice of peace and tolerance prevails.

To overcome misperceptions, we must also educate and inform our populations about the differences and commonalities between our cultures. I have long rejected the notion that we face a clash of civilizations. We are instead confronted with a world that seems to have been reduced in size by the forces of globalization. We should appeal to our media to educate and to build bridges between us rather than equating differences with incompatibility, threats and

fear. We should approach the diversity of our cultures as having given our world its colour and vibrant beauty.

Afghanistan over the past seven years has been a powerful case for the prospect of a genuine cooperation among civilizations aimed at achieving common goals. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United States of America, members of the European Union, Japan, China, India, the United Arab Emirates, Iran and Pakistan are engaged in supporting our efforts to rebuild Afghanistan, and they have been engaged in joint projects, such as building our national ring road from the East to the West of the country. Indeed, our future as a peaceful world lies in the extent to which cooperation among civilizations, as exemplified in Afghanistan, can become the rule and not the exception.

I am truly honoured to be here today to underscore the importance of an international effort to promote tolerance and mutual acceptance and to fight extremism. We fully support King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud in his efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance. Our great religious traditions and the basic tenets of our faiths must guide us. We must all remember the words of our holy books, and we must conquer our basic instincts of fear and hatred.

It is our great hope that dialogues such as that in Madrid and today's in New York will serve to make us all aware of the fact that peace, tolerance and respect are the heritage of all of us and that extremism of all kinds is rooted not in religion but in the reckless pursuit of narrowly defined political interests.

To emphasize the oneness of humankind and to break all barriers, the great, celebrated Persian poet Sa'adi, famously wrote:

"Human beings are members of a whole, In creation of one essence and soul. If one member is afflicted with pain, Other members uneasy will remain. If you have no sympathy for human pain, The name of human you cannot retain."

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

Mr. Hâmid Karzai, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, was escorted from the General Assembly Hall.

Address by Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar.

Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Sheikh Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, Sir, at the outset to convey to you the greetings of His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, the beloved Emir of our country, and His Highness' sincere appreciation to the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for his kind invitation to attend a high-level meeting of the General Assembly on interfaith dialogue, as well as for his presence, his opening of its work and his significant contributions to the promotion of interreligious dialogue.

I also thank you, Your Excellency, Mr. President, for the enthusiasm you have shown in convening this important meeting. I commend the efforts of Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to pursue the promotion of dialogue among civilizations and religions at all levels.

Dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions was one of the most prominent issues in the recommendations of the Outcome Document of the 2005 World Summit, in which we unanimously agreed that furthering relations among nations is the only means to avoid misunderstanding and to fight extremism, because such an approach will ensure the establishment of a just and lasting peace for humankind. Dialogue has become a central policy pillar at the national, regional and international levels for achieving peace and sustainable development. The values of tolerance and respect for various religions and cultures have thus become the foundation of the State of Qatar's policy, which respects and is guided by the tolerant Islamic sharia. The State of Qatar views interreligious and intercultural dialogue as a strategic

choice that urgently requires the creation of an open space, thus ensuring coexistence, peace and stability among peoples.

Since 2003, my country has annually hosted the Doha Conference of Inter-Faith Dialogue as a vital expression of the importance of this option. We have allowed all followers of other monotheistic religions residing in the State of Qatar to construct their places of worship as a concrete expression of the principle of respect for the freedom of creed and worship called for by the tolerant Islamic sharia.

All religions share common ground and have joint pluralistic universal values. They all call for equality, harmony, tolerance and acceptance of others. Throughout the ages, political and economic interests, rather than religious and cultural differences, have been the root causes of confrontation among nations. While those differences do exist in today's world, they are not a cause for confrontation. On the contrary, they must provide a motive for expanding our understanding and deepening our dialogue, as stated in the Holy Koran: "We have made you tribes and families, that you may know each other" (*The Holy Koran, XLIX:13*).

Despite the conflicts that have taken place at times among followers of the three monotheistic religions throughout history, dialogue and coexistence among them have been widely pursued — a fact that highlights the importance of communication and the narrowing of differences.

It is indeed regrettable to see tendencies and attitudes that fuel intolerance and bigotry, thus aggravating tensions and confrontation for such tendencies undermine the process of awakening based on understanding among peoples. Therefore, we cannot but recognize the fact that we must move from the stage of debate to the stage of concrete action. In this context, we in the State of Qatar fully agree with the recommendations issued at the Madrid Conference, most notably concerning the urgent need to agree on establishing universal rules for dialogue among the followers of different religions and cultures with a view to consecrating the human values and moral principles that represent the common denominator among the followers of various religions and cultures, and the drafting of a global document that would help to disseminate and promote a culture of respect for religions, religious symbols and places of worship.

Such a results-oriented approach is the best way to ensure the preservation of human heritage and the promotion and protection of common human values against the threats of isolationism and intolerance.

In this regard, efforts should be made to launch that stage, not only by Governments, but also by all intellectually influential actors in society in the religious, social, economic, academic and artistic fields — and even at the family level, which constitutes the bedrock of society.

The lofty objective of all these efforts is to preserve human dignity, promote the common development of human society and build a harmonious, peaceful world for future generations.

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

Sheikh Hamad bin Jassim bin Jabr Al-Thani, Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of the State of Qatar, was escorted from the rostrum.

Address by Mr. Abbas El Fassi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by the Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco.

Mr. Abbas El Fassi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco, was escorted to the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): I have great pleasure in welcoming His Excellency Mr. Abbas El Fassi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco, and inviting him to address the General Assembly.

Mr. El Fassi (Morocco) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express my deep appreciation and happiness in participating in this high-level meeting of the utmost importance. The Kingdom of Morocco welcomes this noble initiative, which represents another opportunity to further strengthen the fundamentals of communication between the representatives of all faiths. It also encourages interfaith dialogue and reinforces international cooperation with a view to ensuring spiritual security and peaceful coexistence in our societies. I would also

like to express our deep and sincere gratitude to the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and its sovereign, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who spares no effort in promoting and institutionalizing ongoing and constructive dialogue among religions.

His Majesty was instrumental in convening several international meetings aimed at the promotion and consolidation of that dialogue and integrating it into a common system of human values at both the religious and the civilizational levels. Those meetings are part and parcel of other international efforts, including several events that were held in Madrid last July under the auspices of His Majesty King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and His Majesty Don Juan Carlos I of Spain, with the participation of spiritual leaders of the three monotheistic faiths and representatives of other religious and philosophical beliefs. We are convinced that today's meeting will be another step in strengthening the capacities of Member States to face future challenges and ensure wider support for the common system of human values.

The Kingdom of Morocco places great emphasis on and attaches much importance to interfaith dialogue as an issue of increasing interest in a globalized world subject to a transnational and transcontinental technological order. Morocco's interest in interfaith dialogue stems from its awareness of the risks of ethnic and ideological extremism and their consequences, including violence and the denial of the rights of others from different strata of societies, who are often the victims of those who promote religious misconceptions with ill-intentioned objectives.

Based on our belief and thanks to the various initiatives undertaken by His Majesty King Mohammed VI, Morocco has been and remains a key player in the reinforcement of the values of interfaith and intercultural dialogue at the regional and international levels. The Kingdom's initiatives aim at consolidating a culture of tolerance, openness and dialogue.

In that respect, it is worth noting that after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, His Majesty called for a permanent, structural and strategic dialogue among States based on respect for human rights, notably the right to freedom, dignity and peace without distinction or discrimination based on ethnicity, religion or culture.

King Mohammed VI also called for defusing hotbeds of tension and combating the extremism that undermine international peace and stability. In connection with that principle, His Majesty has spared no effort to responsibly and diligently bridge the gap between the parties to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Middle East and to push the peace process forward in an effort to reach a just, lasting and comprehensive peace that conforms to international legal standards and preserves the inalienable political and civil rights of the Palestinian people by allowing them to live in dignity in an independent and sovereign State, side by side with Israel in peace and security, with Al Quds as its capital.

In his capacity as President of the Al Quds Committee, His Majesty has always insisted on the need to respect the special status of Al Quds and to preserving its religious and cultural identity and its historical monuments so that it can remain the vivid symbol of dialogue and coexistence between religions and beliefs that it has been throughout history.

The support of the Kingdom of Morocco for the initiative of the sisterly Saudi Kingdom falls within the framework of seeking the right tools to translate into concrete action the principles and goals of the international community and then into practical applicable measures that would activate interfaith dialogue and promote a culture of peace and cooperation.

In that context, it is important to recall some of the objectives, which can be summarized as follows: define interfaith dialogue theoretically and conceptually and support it through the creation of a follow-up mechanism to help Member States create structures capable of initiating a serious, responsible and genuine dialogue among religions; and encourage academia to promote the culture of dialogue.

In that regard, we propose the establishment of a network of educational institutions and universities as a forum of interaction between the youth of the world, intellectuals and clerics. The network would include modules on interreligious dialogue in school programmes; it would also strengthen the primary role of the media in spreading a culture of tolerance and promoting values of openness, understanding and reconciliation between the freedom of expression and respect for sacred religious and spiritual beliefs.

The responsibility for achieving those objectives lies in the willingness of all countries individually or collectively to make the necessary efforts to implement them. That can be achieved by creating a structured work or action plan that focuses on different activities and is supported by States that will endow it with the operational context that it deserves.

The Kingdom of Morocco is seriously concerned about the rise of phenomena of disrespect for sacred religious and spiritual beliefs, such as Islamophobia, with its widespread negative effects in many parts of the world.

In that context, the Kingdom of Morocco reaffirms the necessity of Member States engaging in serious and responsible dialogue among religions in order to promote the culture of dialogue and to counter, through ideas, two predominant paradigms — the so-called clash of civilizations and end of history — that continue to affect the orientation and approaches of international relations.

From this rostrum, the Kingdom of Morocco expresses its full support for all efforts to counter attempts to discredit religious and sacred values through a global approach that takes into consideration the specificities of all religions and beliefs and prioritizes national and regional policies related to comprehensive development. It also expresses its support for consensual solutions that can be reached through interfaith dialogue and a culture of peace.

The Kingdom of Morocco takes this opportunity to express its support for the initiative of interfaith dialogue and a culture of peace, and looks forward to the adoption of the draft outcome document (A/63/L.24/Rev.1), which, we hope, will give the necessary material and moral support to achieve the noble goals for which we all strive and aspire.

May God Almighty let us not be misguided and grant us blessings. He is the granter of all blessings and peace. May God's blessing be upon you all.

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

Mr. Abbas El Fassi, Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Morocco, was escorted from the rostrum.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): The Assembly will now hear an address by His Eminence Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue of the Observer State of the Holy See.

Cardinal Tauran (Holy See) (*spoke in French*): I should like to associate myself with all those who have preceded me in this debate to voice, on behalf of my delegation, the deepest thanks for the welcome accorded to us.

I have the privilege of conveying the warm support of Pope Benedict XVI, for whom the culture of peace is an obligation, as his Magisterium demonstrates. He had the opportunity of expressing that here, together with the high regard that he has for the work of the United Nations.

Today, how can we not remember, given the reason we are gathered — the culture of peace — that the United Nations, by virtue of its nature and mission, should be a school for peace? Here, we should learn always to think and act taking into account the legitimate aspirations and interests of all. Here, all Member States are equal in dignity and their daily debates, like their great decisions, can increase the sense of belonging to the same family. As Members strive to overcome the simple logic of relations of strength to allow the rule of law and the wisdom of peoples to prevail, they become the craftsmen of peace.

In that very demanding task, as Members know, believers and their communities have their place and their role. As has been reiterated here this morning, religions, despite the weaknesses and contradictions of their followers, are messengers of reconciliation and peace.

In their families, their schools and their places of worship, believers who pray, live in harmony and support all initiatives that contribute to protecting the human person and the Earth are also teaching the language and gestures of peace. They strive to listen, understand, respect the other and trust him before judging him. Such attitudes educate and open the way for peace.

We, believers, wish to offer that legacy of values and attitudes to all, because we believe, as Pope Benedict XVI has said, that peace is compromised by indifference to the true nature of man.

Every week, millions of believers gather in their synagogues, their churches, their mosques and other places of worship to pray. There, they experience

brotherhood. They achieve unity in diversity. They remind us all that man does not live by bread alone. We believers wish to make that wisdom available to all. Religions give meaning to the human adventure by inviting contemplation and harmony among oneself, others and creation.

To achieve that, above all, believers must express themselves consistently and credibly. They cannot use religion to oppress freedom of conscience, justify violence, spread hate and fanaticism or undermine the separation of politics and religion.

Moreover, participating in public dialogue in the societies of which they are members, believers feel called to help further the common good, which is based on a pillar of values that all of us, believers and non-believers alike, share: the sanctity of life, the dignity of the human person, respect for freedom of conscience and religion, regard for responsible freedom, acceptance of different opinions, the appropriate use of reason, the enjoyment of democracy, and care for natural resources, to mention but a few.

Last July, at the Madrid Conference, the participants, who belonged to different religions, stated in the final Declaration that:

“Dialogue is one of the necessities of life. It is also one of the most important means of mutual understanding, cooperation, ... and realization of the truth, which contributes to the happiness of humankind.” (A/63/311, annex, para. 9)

That is the dialogue we are engaged in here today.

In conclusion, I would now like to speak on behalf of the Catholic Church to assure the international community of the will of its priests and its faithful to continue to offer to all their brothers and sisters in humankind the spirit of brotherhood, the strength of prayer and the hope offered by Christ, who “hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us” (*The Holy Bible, Ephesians 2:14*). Such values inspire our deeds on Earth, where man suffers and hopes.

May we all together, without forsaking our cultural and religious differences, lead the way to a surer and more unified world. Let us go beyond mere tolerance and unsound conciliation. Let us make brotherhood not merely an ideal, but a reality.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.