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GENERAL ASSEMBLY DECLARES 18 JULY 'NELSON MANDELA INTERNATIONAL DAY'

Annual Celebration Will Commemorate Mandela's Contribution to 'Promotion of a Culture of Peace;' Assembly Also Adopts Text on Alliance of Civilizations

Underscoring the importance of dialogue and tolerance to enriching cultures and promoting understanding among faiths, the General Assembly capped its two-day debate on the culture of peace with the adoption of two consensus resolutions that sought to make peace a way of life for people around the world.

With that in mind, and recognizing the long-standing dedication of former South African President and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Nelson Mandela to humanity -- particularly in the areas of conflict resolution, race relations, human rights promotion, reconciliation and gender equality -- the Assembly adopted a text declaring 18 July, his birthday, as an International Day, to be observed annually starting in 2010.

By adopting that resolution, the world body expressed its appreciation for a great man who had suffered for the sake of people everywhere, said General Assembly President Ali Abdussalam Treki, of Libya. Those thoughts were echoed resoundingly among the 19 speakers who also appealed for the creation of a world in which racism, hatred and human rights abuse would no longer find refuge.

The delegate of the United Republic of Tanzania called Mr. Mandela a visionary leader -- the icon of the struggle for freedom -- whose life had been the ultimate definition of peace, both in South Africa and throughout the world. As a young leader of the African National Congress (ANC) party in South Africa, Mr. Mandela had chosen the path of non-violent mass action to fight the juggernaut of apartheid.

Recounting Mr. Mandela's 27-year imprisonment, he said Mr. Mandela had declared, during his trial, that he had fought against white domination, black domination, and had "cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities." It was a cause for which he was prepared to die. But perhaps Mr. Mandela's most outstanding contribution to world peace was his call for reconciliation with South Africa's former oppressors. That was an example to be emulated by all.

In a similar vein, India's delegate said the adoption of the resolution was a fitting compliment to the "incessant struggle" of a living legend, whose core values of peace and tolerance were also embodied in the United Nations Charter. As a nation of unparalleled diversity, India would not have succeeded in holding together a composite identity if Indians had not been determined to live in peace. Conflict in today's world was largely driven by the absence of tolerance -- and the magnitude of such problems required people to work together to find new solutions.

Such remarks spoke to the ideals captured in a broader resolution on the Alliance of Civilizations, adopted by the Assembly in recognition of intercultural dialogue as one way to promote tolerance in matters related to religion or belief.

By the text -- jointly introduced yesterday by the delegates of Spain and Turkey, whose Governments launched the initiative in 2005 to promote a culture of peace and dialogue -- the

Assembly encouraged Governments, global organizations and civil society to participate in the Third Forum of the Alliance to be held in Brazil in 2010, and in upcoming Forums, in Qatar in 2011, and Austria in 2012.

Indeed, a culture of peace, the rule of law and human rights were essential for societies today, said Saudi Arabia's representative. With that in mind, King Abdullah had taken various efforts to address culture, including by initiating the Assembly's 2008 high-level meeting to promote interreligious and intercultural understanding.

However, he was deeply concerned at the continued hate directed towards some religious groups and he called for a peaceful co-existence, especially among Islam, Judaism and Christianity, through the United Nations, with a goal of bringing about a dialogue that underscored the positive aspects of those religions and addressed the gaps in achieving desired goals.

For Indonesia's delegate, the freedom of expression was a basic universal right best enjoyed if used responsibly. But it was not an absolute freedom. No group or individual should be allowed to ridicule anything of sacred value in a community's religion, and States had to strive for a judicious balance between the right to freedom of expression and the demands of cultural sensitivity. The Assembly should do more than just bring people of different faiths and cultures together -- it had to help translate the shared values of peace and tolerance through the fields of education, culture, media and religion.

Rounding out the discussion, the Permanent Observer of the Holy See said religions tended to translate ideals into action, purify institutions and heal memories scarred by injustice. Interfaith dialogue that examined the theological and spiritual foundations of religions, with a view to creating understanding, was growing more imperative. The protagonists of that dialogue were Member States, in their interaction with civil society.

Also addressing the Assembly today were the representatives of Republic of Korea, Thailand, Brazil, Ethiopia, Togo, United States, Cuba, Nigeria, Portugal, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Canada, Zambia, Montenegro and Japan.

Colombia's delegate spoke on a point of order.

The Assembly will reconvene at 10 a.m. Thursday, 12 November, to discuss the question of equitable representation and increase in Security Council membership, and related matters.

Background

The General Assembly met today to continue and conclude its debate on the culture of peace. For that discussion, it had before it the Secretary-General's report on Interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (document A/64/325) and the report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010 (document A/64/312).

The Assembly was also expected to take action on four resolutions: International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010 (document A.64/L.5), Nelson Mandela International Day (document A/64/L.13), The Alliance of Civilizations (document A/64/L.14) and Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (document A/64/L.15). (For more information, please see Press Release GA/10884).

Statements

HASAN KLEIB (Indonesia) said dialogue was an important human process and the Assembly should do better than just bringing people of different faiths and cultures together -- it must take concrete steps to enhance mutual understanding among diverse civilizations, translating the shared values of peace and tolerance through the fields of education, culture, media and religion. Indonesia made use of dialogue among various communal groups to ensure harmony and promote development. Indeed, it was not enough to lift people out of poverty -- "we must also redeem them from narrow-mindedness, prejudice and intolerance," he said.

Beyond its borders, Indonesia also had launched dialogues in subregional and regional frameworks, including in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), he explained. The Government attached great significance to State efforts to promote respect for diversity, freedom and justice. While freedom of expression was a basic universal right, it was enjoyed best if used responsibly. Freedom of expression was a political, economic and social imperative -- but it was not an absolute freedom. No group or individual should be allowed to ridicule anything of sacred value in a community's religion, and States must strive for a judicious balance between the right to freedom of expression and the demands of cultural sensitivity.

Finally, he said Indonesia attached great importance to the media's role in nurturing social harmony. Indonesia recognized the media's role in combating prejudice, and also encouraged non-governmental actors to play an active role in the quest for harmony. His Government firmly believed in the potential of the global campaign -- be it of an interreligious and intercultural nature or between civilizations -- as a tool for creating harmony in inter-State relations. The more intensive the dialogue, the brighter the outlook for humankind, he said. Indonesia fully supported the four draft resolutions under consideration and looked forward to their adoption by consensus.

KIM BONGHYUN (Republic of Korea) said that the increasing technological and cultural interconnectedness brought everyone closer, but it was imperative to reflect on shared differences and deeper, lasting universal similarities. Those similarities were grounded in peace, and formed a stronger historical backbone than strife between diverse groups and religions did. Thus, it was important to resist the thesis of an inevitable clash of civilizations, especially since the world should not be defined by differences and conflicts but by mutual humanity and similarities.

Tolerance between religions, civilizations, cultures, and certain societies needed to be a cornerstone of this necessary vision. Republic of Korea supported the multilateral endeavours in furthering the culture of peace among Member States, international organizations and civil society, he said. Those included a broad range of efforts that promoted interreligious and intercultural dialogue, such as the Alliance of Civilizations and notable initiatives led by UNESCO towards fostering a culture of peace through education, via the implementation of the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

Thus, he supported the mandate and activities of the Alliance, including an understanding of religious and cultural differences through the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations and Inter-faith Dialogue. He commended the dynamic activities of the United Nations Population Fund as elucidated in the Report of the Secretary-General. Those activities had brought together diverse faith-based partners to address the multifaceted and universal challenges that population had on larger development and human rights issues. Religion was a significant aspect in many societies and a source of values for individuals. For that reason, religion needed to be a source of peace and an underlying connector.

NORACHIT SINHASANI (Thailand) said it was fitting and appropriate that the United Nations recognized Nelson Mandela's values and his dedication to the service of humanity. Mr. Mandela was truly an international icon of a culture of peace, equality and democracy. Thailand highly appreciated the ongoing efforts to raise awareness on issues relating to interreligious and intercultural dialogue, particularly the proclamation of the Year 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures. He agreed wholeheartedly with the UNESCO Director-General on the need for a holistic approach that would incorporate various United Nations agencies, Member States, civil society and non-governmental organizations.

Thailand appreciated the ongoing consultations concerning the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, which could promote sustainable actions on this issue. A culture of peace, like peace itself, had to be built, continuously supported and sustained. Thailand welcomed the active role of the Alliance of the Civilizations and the expanded contribution of its Group of Friends and the development of its global network of civil society.

Thailand firmly believed that efforts to promote a culture of peace began at home. A solid foundation, through institutional and legislative regulations and frameworks, needed to be firmly laid down to ensure the rights of people to enjoy cultural diversity and non-discrimination. Thailand's Constitution ensured the rights of all its citizens to preserve their local customs, local wisdom, arts and culture. Thailand would keep working closely with the Assembly, the various United Nations bodies and everyone to build a culture of peace, he said.

REGINA MARIA CORDEIRO DUNLOP ([Brazil](#)) said “a culture of peace cannot be promoted without efforts aimed at bringing different cultures, traditions and ideas together.” The Assembly President’s choice of “a dialogue among civilizations for international peace, security and development” as a main theme of his presidency was timely and pertinent. Often, diversity had been misused to fuel discontent: the world had seen instances of conflict between people from different ethnic, racial or cultural backgrounds. But that should not detract from the fact that diversity -- when well managed -- was indeed an asset. By promoting knowledge about the other, education had a fundamental role in allaying misperceptions and mistrust.

For Brazil, a culture of peace was a culture of respect for human rights, and the lack of progress in realizing those rights was at the root of discord among different ethnic or cultural groups, she explained. Brazil was proud of the various races, traditions and cultures that comprised the Brazilian identity. Noting that the Third Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations would take place in Brazil in May 2010, she said it would provide an opportunity for all to discuss ways to promote intercultural dialogue. She was sure that the Forum would contribute to efforts towards a culture of peace.

MESFIN MIDEKSSA ([Ethiopia](#)) opened by saying that a durable peace and prosperity could only be secured through a continuous process of dialogue among different views and interests. Numerous conflicts took place among people in various parts of the world, partly due to lack of tolerance to differences in outlook, and it was only through dialogue that such differences could be overcome. The promotion of interactive dialogue and understanding between and among the major world religions and cultures was a noble idea to which all must pay due significance, and exert concerted action and sustained commitment. Such commitment would evince hope for a peaceful world, where tolerance, respect and accommodation, rather than rejection and confrontation prevailed, and where misunderstandings based on ignorance and fear between and among peoples were removed.

In Ethiopia, tolerance and respect among different cultures, ethnicities and faiths were fundamental to their way of life. As a matter of fact, given the multitude of languages, colours, religious beliefs and customs, the Government considered it a question of survival so as to make sure that the nation could continually hold itself together. The Ethiopian Federal Constitution was firmly anchored on the principle of according genuine recognition and safeguarding the individual identities and rights, as well as ensuring the full representation and participation of all nations and nationalities in the country. With the adoption of the Constitution, Ethiopia further entrenched its age-long tradition and culture of peace and peaceful co-existence as a tolerant society, embracing all sorts of differences in cultural identity and religious beliefs.

KOKOU NAYO M'BEOU ([Togo](#)) said measures by UNESCO to enhance the culture of peace through education deserved support, particularly that agency’s “learning to live together” ethics programme. As part of the effort to promote respect for religions, cultures and civilizations, the leaders of the monotheistic religions had an essential role to play, and he welcomed last year’s high-level debate in the Assembly on cultural diversity, held at the initiative of the King of Saudi Arabia. Indeed, King Abdullah had said everything that needed to be said to bring an end to violence.

Simply belonging to a religion should not be a source of hatred, he said. What had to be combated was fundamentalism and extremism, which, unfortunately, were gaining support. It would be “suicidal” to be lax on that issue. Quoting Israeli President Shimon Perez, he said: “we cannot change what happened in the past but we can change what happens in the future.”

Article 2 of Togo’s Constitution guaranteed equality irrespective of religion, social condition, gender and religious belief, among other things, he said. Religions coexisted in mutual understanding, including Animism, Christianity and Islam. That was the fruit of efforts by religious leaders and the Government, which had met on various occasions. Togo understood the virtues of dialogue and had always tried to overcome factors that divided people. Togo had co-sponsored all the resolutions favouring a culture of peace and supported the Secretary-General’s recommendations on the International Decade, contained in document A/64/312.

LAURA ROSS ([United States](#)) said Nelson Mandela had faced a regime of deep cruelty and the Government of South Africa had created institutions with the semblance of democracy to cloak the most iron control. Mr. Mandela saw a great evil and had dedicated himself to bringing it down. During the long years he spent jailed off the coast of Cape Town, he cherished “the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities.” That was the

ideal he had lived for and the ideal for which he was prepared to die.

Apartheid had been conceived in deceit and violence, but it had ended in truth and reconciliation. Mr. Mandela used his moral power for moral purpose. There was no easy road to freedom for South Africa. Nor was the road easy for its great emancipator. The Republic of South Africa was finally a Republic. The United States was founded on the belief that all people were created equal and worked to make real the full promise of its founding. The United States saw a hero and kindred spirit in Mr. Mandela, she said. He knew that just and decent government required the power of the mind, but that reconciliation was a matter of the heart.

PEDRO NÚÑEZ MOSQUERA ([Cuba](#)) supported the resolution on the annual declaration of 18 July as "Nelson Mandela Day", particularly as Cuba had participated in Africa's historic fight for liberation and self-determination. Strict respect for the United Nations Charter was the basis for achieving a culture of peace. The 2001-2010 Decade for a Culture of Peace was coming to an end, and the Assembly must recognize that it had not achieved its stated objectives. Dialogue was the only option in dealing with the unilateralism that worked to keep the countries of the global South under domination. Cuba adhered to multilateralism, which was the only way to address international problems. He supported the Declaration and Plan of Action of the Culture of Peace, the Dialogue among Civilizations and UNESCO's work in that area.

He explained that peace was not merely an absence of conflict -- it required promoting education, sustainable economic and social development and respect for human rights. He urged rejecting actions that fostered prejudice, racial profiling and the defamation of religion. All doctrines based on racial or cultural superiority should be vehemently rejected and there should be respect for diversity of political, social, cultural and religious systems. There should also be concrete actions to promote environmental sustainability.

In that context, he said there could be no culture of peace when military bases were located in other countries -- that was happening vis-à-vis the world's only super-Power. There was a dizzying rate of military expenditure -- over \$1.4 trillion -- 60 per cent of which was concentrated in one country. How could there be a culture of peace when some 10 million children would die from preventable disease? If the rich Western countries were truly interested in such issues, they should promote an equal world order. "The solution is in our hands," he said.

OLUGBENGA ASHIRU ([Nigeria](#)) urged Member States to cooperate with the Secretariat by including the Alliance of Civilization goals in their national agendas and through implementation of such goals in their national plans and intercultural dialogues. As a multi-ethnic and multireligious society, Nigeria naturally encouraged the promotion of a culture of peace not only to encourage non-violence, but to ensure harmonious living despite cultural, linguistic and religious diversities.

He said Nigeria believed that the strategy for building a culture of peace must incorporate broad parameters, including devising means of resolving ongoing conflicts so they did not degenerate further, development of institutional frameworks and relevant capacities for peace initiatives, and mobilizing resources at national and regional levels for peace initiatives. Turning to the media, he pointed out the significance of the media in promoting a culture of peace by targeting programmes that promoted peace and religious tolerance and dialogue among all faiths, noting that the media could also serve as a bulwark in preventing the defamation of religious and cultural values.

Stressing that the promotion of peace and understanding through mutual dialogue, tolerance and respect for each other required a collective effort; he stated that it was thus pertinent for everyone to join hands in that endeavour in order to propel the world towards a more peaceful and prosperous one. He further called for more efforts towards the promotion of interfaith dialogue, in the belief that it would bring about understanding of differences and enable everyone to tap into their rich cultural and common diversity, declaring: "We must overcome intolerance and hatred and all false notions about our different ethnic, cultural and religious affiliations so that we can truly live together in an atmosphere of peace and love, one that can strengthen growth and development for all."

VIJAY RAMNIKLAL RUPANI ([India](#)) said he was satisfied to co-sponsor the resolution on the Nelson Mandela International Day, and gave rich tribute to him, a visionary and great leader of the times, whose life was deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest apostle of peace and non-violence. "The adoption of this resolution was a fitting compliment to the incessant struggle of this living legend in his dedication to the service of humanity, struggle against racial discrimination and

democracy internationally, and in the promotion of a culture of peace throughout the world," he said.

In addition, he invoked the Charter, which said the Organization's Member States were determined to practice tolerance and live in peace. Therefore, peace and tolerance formed the core set of values that the United Nations had painstakingly promoted since its inception, including the promotion of attitudes and ways of life that underscored freedom, justice, solidarity, and respect for diversity, dialogue and understanding. Much of the conflict in today's world was driven by the absence of tolerance, he continued. The magnitude of such problems required that people work together to find new solutions.

What was needed was to create an environment conducive for fostering dialogue between diverse cultures, faiths and religions that inculcated the values that promoted transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace. Turning to the history of India, he said it was a "story of conversations between different civilisations," and that today, the country was home to the most diverse mix of people professing different faiths, having some of the largest populations of the great religions of the world. As a nation of unparalleled diversity, India would not have succeeded in holding together and strengthening a composite Indian identity unless Indians had not been determined to live in peace. Mahatma Gandhi had rightly said, "Intolerance is itself a form of violence and obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit."

JOSÉ FILIPE MORAES CABRAL (Portugal) said that today was marked by two pivotal events, the Assembly's decision to adopt respective resolutions on the commemoration of "Nelson Mandela Day" each year on 18 July, and on the role of the Alliance of Civilizations in reinforcing peace, stability and respect. He said that Mr. Mandela had fought a lifelong battle for justice, peace, democracy and human rights, giving new meaning to fairness, reconciliation, forgiveness and understanding. That should be an inspiration to everyone who strove for a better world that enshrined all those elements, he added. Mr. Mandela had also been a hero who fought for Africa's liberation and unity, a struggle which spread throughout the world and paved the path for a new, global culture of peace.

Turning to the second resolution, he said that a few years after it had come into being, The Alliance of Civilizations had rallied the support of Governments, civil society and international organizations. It had also elucidated that mutual understanding could bring about more global peace and understanding, primarily through dialogue. The Alliance had set out to pursue such goals through national and regional strategies on youth, education, media and migration. He said the General Assembly's recognition of the Alliance's importance was timely and crucial, and hoped that more Member States would endorse it.

AUGUSTINE P. MAHIGA (United Republic of Tanzania) said the Assembly sought to make peace a way of life through positive education, social cooperation and enlightened political leadership. In that context, his Government celebrated Nelson Mandela, a visionary leader who was the icon of the struggle for freedom. His life had been the ultimate definition of peace, both in South Africa and throughout the world. Mr. Mandela represented dignity in the face of humanity; magnanimity in the face of injustice.

As a young leader of the African National Congress (ANC), Mr. Mandela had chosen the path of non-violent mass action to fight the juggernaut of apartheid. Mr. Mandela was jailed for 27 years, and during his trial, said: "I have fought against white domination, and I have fought against black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities." It was one for which he was prepared to die, he recounted.

On his release from prison in 1990, Mr. Mandela had thanked the world for its contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle, he explained. Among the United Nations' greatest achievements was its contribution to freedom and independence from colonialism and apartheid in Africa. It was only fitting that the Assembly should honour Mr. Mandela as the last legend of Africa's liberation struggle, in the ranks of his predecessors: Nkrumah, Kenyatta, Nyerere, Azikiwe, Sengho and others. Perhaps Mr. Mandela's most outstanding contribution to world peace was his call for reconciliation with South Africa's former oppressors. That was an example that should be emulated by all.

IVAN BARBALIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina) said that besides the many advances in many areas globally since the end of the cold war, the world now faced an increase in social, cultural,

religious and other kinds of tensions and confrontations, some of which had turned into full-scale armed conflicts. In the process, fundamental human rights had come under assault and too many lives had been lost, including in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In such a situation, the need for advanced intercultural and interreligious dialogue in promoting tolerance and peace took on paramount importance, particularly for his country. In that regard, he recognized that protecting the freedom of religion while respecting traditions was among the fundamental and basic rights for achieving a comprehensive peace.

Bosnia and Herzegovina was also among those States committed to releasing themselves from the disputes of the past and overcoming them by practicing a culture of peace and dialogue, and urged that everyone needed to learn that tolerance was the ability to exercise a fair and objective attitude towards those whose opinions, practices, religion, nationality and others, differed from one's own. The country had also realized that dialogue had to be conducted on a platform of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and dignity of the individual, and was fully aware that without an open dialogue there could be no true reconciliation as well.

Reaffirming his country's commitment to dialogue among cultures and civilizations, he said, like others in the region, Bosnia and Herzegovina had the same goal: to secure integration into a unified Europe, which, he believed, held the promise of stability and prosperity, free of interreligious and inter-ethnic conflicts. He further reaffirmed the country's belief that mutual respect, rooted in dialogue and nourished by the notion that a multicultural and multireligious society was indispensable for its strategy of peace preservation, regional stability and the so important resolution of conflicts.

HENRI-PAUL NORMANDIN ([Canada](#)) said his delegation was pleased to debate the culture of peace and he thanked Bangladesh, Philippines and Pakistan for introducing initiatives that supported peace and dialogue. Canada was pleased to support the creation of an annual "Nelson Mandela Day," celebrating one of the greatest statesmen of all time, who was a unifying symbol, a man of courage, and willing to sacrifice his own life for all South Africans. Mr. Mandela stood for peace and reconciliation, for he united his nation through creation of a democratic South Africa.

He said that in 1993, along with FW de Klerk, Mr. Mandela had received the Nobel Peace Prize. When Mr. Mandela left office he did so with grace and dignity, under the terms of a new South African Constitution. But he was not finished; truly great men did not need to be officials to be leaders. Through his efforts at conflict mediation and his work with children, Mr. Mandela had led by example, guided by his sense of justice and his deep compassion and caring for fellow human beings.

Canada had awarded Mr. Mandela many of its highest honours. In 2001, in recognition of his great moral leadership to South Africa and all of humanity, he was granted honorary Canadian citizenship, a mark of respect for those of highest esteem. "Nelson Mandela is a role model of our times. We welcome his resolution as it seeks to ensure that his values, including his commitment to democracy and the protection of human rights, and his dedication to the service of humanity, will continue to guide us and our children for years to come," he said.

LAZAROUS KAPAMBWE ([Zambia](#)) recalled that many things said about Nelson Mandela had also been said in the hallowed walls of the United Nations. Some of the remarks had been complimentary -- and he deserved all such remarks. Others had been uncomplimentary and, as a human, he had deserved those to. Today, the Assembly honoured the man as well as the principles and ideals that he had always represented: courage, perseverance, peace, justice, reconciliation, freedom, endurance, and human dignity. "Mandela is special", he said. "He is a world treasure." Zambia was proud to be a co-sponsor of the resolution proclaiming 18 July as Nelson Mandela International Day.

NEBOJŠA KALUDJEROVIĆ ([Montenegro](#)) said that during its four year existence, the Alliance of Civilizations had significantly increased its reach and scope and achieved rapid progress in the implementation of its objectives, a clear sign of the strong and growing support and goodwill of many countries and partners in the promotion of peace, tolerance, mutual understanding and coexistence, leading to a better world. As an innovative and dynamic initiative, the Alliance had been very effective in fostering cross-cultural cooperation between religions, national and cultural communities.

He said the Alliance had advanced its goals and shaped its agenda for good governance of cultural diversity at a global level, as well as in introducing concrete projects, results-oriented policies and practical actions that delivered. And it still remained a strong forum for an open, inclusive and

global dialogue. Many members of the Group of Friends, including Montenegro, had taken upon advancing the goals of the Alliance through National Strategies, focusing on tangible outcomes in the fields of education, youth, migration, and the media.

Highlighting the importance of incorporating the Alliance into regional processes through the creation of Regional Strategies, where the priority was given to the cross-cultural polarization in relations between Muslim and Western societies, he stressed that such regional strategies were an important tool designed to help countries facing similar challenges to create common opportunities to address them, compare their approaches, share information about shortcomings, successes and lessons learned. They could also be used to boost regional initiatives and regional coordination.

Bearing that in mind, he looked forward to the approval of the Regional Strategy for South East Europe during the Conference scheduled for December this year in Sarajevo.

KHALID K.A. FAQEEH ([Saudi Arabia](#)) said a culture of peace, rule of law and human rights was essential. It was clear that respect for international law was the only way to solve conflict and reduce tensions. However, some minorities sought to take advantage of progress in communications technology to foster hate. Under the United Nations aegis, his Government hoped to work towards dialogue, tolerance and peace among cultures and peoples. Dialogue between cultures depended on the role of the media, and with that in mind, the Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah had taken initiatives to address culture. In that context, he cited a special Muslim summit held in Mecca, which had called for rejecting intolerance, as well as the 2008 high-level Assembly meeting aimed at bringing about understanding.

The second trajectory for dialogue was more cultural in nature, he explained. Indeed, 2007 had seen the meeting, in Madrid, of the Alliance of Civilizations, as well as efforts geared towards establishing an international centre for tolerance. However, he was deeply concerned at continued intolerance and hate directed towards some religious groups and he had insisted on respect for others, regardless of religion or belief systems. He called for a peaceful co-existence, especially among Islam, Judaism and Christianity, through the United Nations, with a goal to bring about dialogue that underscored both the positive aspects of those religions and the gaps in achieving the desired goals. The spread of a culture of peace was a global effort.

TAKASHI ASHIKI ([Japan](#)), noting that Japan attached great importance to dialogue among civilizations, expressed his support for the work of the Alliance Civilizations and hoped that, in cooperation with other organizations working in the same field, the Alliance would produce concrete results.

He said UNESCO had long been active in the field of intellectual dialogue, and at the 181st session of the agency's Executive Board in April, the Secretary-General's Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Jorge Sampaio, had confirmed the importance of strengthening cooperation with the Alliance, which Japan welcomed. Japan was also pleased that UNESCO's new Director-General, Irina Bokova, would continue and strengthen that organization's partnership with the Alliance of Civilizations, which had been established by her predecessor, Koichiro Matsuura. In that regard, Japan supported the resolution before the meeting and hoped for its adoption by consensus.

CELESTINO MIGLIORE, [Permanent Observer of the Holy See](#), recalled that at the start of the industrial revolution, religion had been described as "the opium of the people." Today, in the context of globalization, it was increasingly regarded as the "vitamin of the poor." The unique contribution of religions -- and the cooperation among them -- lay in their *raison d'être*: to serve the spiritual dimension of human nature. Religions tended, as well, to raise the human spirit, translate ideals into action, purify institutions and heal memories scarred by injustice. At the same time, it was well known that people manipulated religions and, likewise, nationalist movements had used religious difference as an opportunity to garner support for their own causes.

Against that backdrop, interfaith dialogue that aimed at examining the theological and spiritual foundations of religions, with a view to mutual understanding, was growing more imperative, he said. In that context, the Holy See had carried out initiatives to promote dialogue among Christian denominations, with people of Jewish faith, Buddhists and Hindus, including a first-of-its-kind document on *A Common Word Between Us and You*, which had garnered 138 Muslim signatories. That type of spiritual dialogue offered an indispensable basis for a broader culture of dialogue and cooperation among academic, political and economic institutions.

He said that the protagonists of dialogue were Member States, in their interaction with civil society. Indeed, their approach stemmed from the very mission of the United Nations. The United Nations' primary responsibility regarding religion was to debate and help States fully ensure, at all levels, the implementation of the right to religious freedom, as affirmed in relevant United Nations documents. That right included the full respect for and promotion of the freedom of conscience and expression of religion without restriction. Indeed, the United Nations' goal in pursuing interreligious understanding was to engage States in promoting the dignity and rights of all.

Following that statement, the General Assembly President noted that action on draft resolutions entitled International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010 (document A/64/L.5) and Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (document A/64/L.15) would be taken at a later date.

Action on drafts

The Assembly then adopted by consensus a draft resolution on Nelson Mandela International Day (document A/64/L.13). In adopting the text, the General Assembly President said the world body had expressed its adherence to freedom, respect, honour and appreciation for a great man who suffered for the sake of people everywhere.

Next, the Assembly adopted, by consensus as orally revised, the draft resolution on Alliance of Civilizations (document A/64/L.14), which aimed to promote a culture of peace, the Assembly would welcome efforts by the Secretary-General to promote greater understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures and religions.

Speaking after action, the representative of Colombia said he had raised his flag before adoption of resolution A/64/L.13 to add its name to co-sponsors and he requested that that be noted on the record.

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