



Statement by

*His Majesty King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa
King of Bahrain*

at

*the High Level Meeting on Dialogue
between Religions and Cultures*

United Nations, New York

12-13 November, 2008

Statement by
His Majesty King Hamad Bin Isa Al-Khalifa
King of Bahrain

at
the High Level Meeting on Dialogue
between Religions and Cultures

United Nations, New York

12-13 November, 2008

**In the name of God, the Merciful, the
Compassionate**

*Mr. President,
Mr. Secretary-General,
Your Majesties, Highnesses, Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

At the outset, I would like to extend my thanks and appreciation to my brother the Custodian of the Holy Places, King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Al-Saud, King of Saudi Arabia, for inviting us to the inauguration of this outstanding initiative, through the highest international forum, to strengthen the language of dialogue and understanding between religions and cultures. Such initiative is in line with supporting the principle of mutual respect, and the achievement of peace and security for all humanity. It is one of the most important initiatives currently on the international stage, in light of its positive results and effects.

We seize this opportunity also to thank His Excellency Father Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the Sixty-third Session of the United Nations General Assembly, for holding this important meeting, and commend his efforts to consolidate the values of justice within the peoples of the world, and to reinforce the values of solidarity, equity and transparency in international relations, with the help of the members of the international community and the Secretary-General of the United Nations, who have a distinguished role in reaching the goals and targets of the UN Charter.

Mr. President,

We are meeting today as an international family to activate what was agreed upon during the World Conference on Religious Dialogue, held in Madrid in July 2008, kindly initiated by the Custodian of the Two Holy Places, at which the participants called for a Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on dialogue between religions.

The Kingdom of Bahrain fully supports the contents of the Madrid Declaration, which affirmed the unity of humanity, equality between people regardless of colour, race, or culture, respect for diversity among cultures and civilizations, and respect between the followers of God's religions, while taking full account of the particularities of peoples, and considering terrorism a worldwide phenomenon requiring a united stand to address its causes and effects, at the same time agreeing on its definition and meaning.

Mr. President,

The philosophical and historical roots of human rights are enshrined in our different religions, civilizations and cultures. More than fourteen centuries ago, the Islamic Sharia took the lead in defending human rights while witnessing God's gesture to his creatures by supporting His message throughout the world, regardless of culture, creed or colour. God stated in His Holy Book:

“And indeed We have honoured the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with At-Taiyibât (lawful good things), and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preference.” Surat Al-Isra, Verse 70.

Since its rise, Islam has offered its hand in positive friendship to all civilizations that guarantee the continuation of dialogue, openness and human exchanges, within a set of ethical values accepted by all laws and nations. In this regard, everybody is seeking a common mechanism to achieve peaceful coexistence through mutual understanding and respect, built on shared trust between all human societies.

Distinguished Participants,

The diversity of religions and creeds should be a source of dialogue to shield humanity against

conflicts and disputes that would increase divisions between peoples. Religions should not be implicated in the traumas which humanity has experienced in past decades. We should recognise that the real cause of these traumas has been the absence of systematic dialogue, such that some believers have engaged in extremism, imagining that they are carrying out a religious duty. Religion disowns such extremists. In addition, distancing humanity from the ethics and values called for by different religions has made corruption widespread, increased crime, drugs and the growth of a terrorism which does not recognise any religion, sect or nation.

Mr. President,

Despite the connection between the essence of human rights and cultural diversity, on one hand, and common human destiny, on the other hand, we find that some narrow interests and aspirations in some cases undermine these rights. Instead of affirming and supporting the brotherly equality

among all people, it foments hatred, racism and division, such as Islamophobia which are promoted by some quarters in order to arouse hatred and sedition between peoples for narrow political goals which aspire to conflict between civilizations. Such issues ignore Islamic decency and teachings that reject violence and which call for peace, security, justice, mercy and brotherhood between all humans. The Almighty stated in the Holy Book:

“O mankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another.” Surat Al-Hujurât, Verse 13.

Mr. President,

The Kingdom of Bahrain, over the ages, was and still is a fertile land for distinguished coexistence between all religions, due to its laws, which respect human rights, such that the followers of different religions in the Kingdom enjoy full freedom in

practising their rituals and in building their places of worship. The Kingdom of Bahrain hosts 14 churches and synagogues, as well as a number of other places of worship for different religious creeds. All, citizens and visitors alike, are practising their rights, guaranteed by the state. Bahrainis are proud of the coexistence such religions and sects, through their open cultural diversity, based on supreme Islamic values.

There is no doubt that the followers of these religions have contributed effectively over the ages to the advancement of the Kingdom of Bahrain. Everybody lived, with God’s grace, in a brotherly atmosphere, characterised by affection and friendship that made our Kingdom a model for coexistence in a unique cultural and intellectual diversity.

Mr. President,

Due to the Kingdom of Bahrain's eagerness to support the progress of dialogue among religions, it has hosted many conferences and workshops attended by senior religious figures, thinkers and theologians. The Kingdom of Bahrain hosted, in 2002, a conference on Islamic-Christian dialogue, while in January 2008 it organised a Forum for Dialogue Among Civilizations. It also organised reciprocal visits for theologians, preachers and religious thinkers between Eastern and Western countries in order to revitalize the principle of dialogue between the followers of religions and civilizations.

Mr. President,

The United Nations Charter calls for the strengthening of international relations and the establishment of a secure human society through the General Assembly Declaration of 1994, which calls for tolerance, the spreading of a culture of peace, while designating

1995 as the Year for Tolerance, as well as designating 2001 as the Year of Dialogue of Civilizations. We wish to reaffirm that the United Nations is eager in its efforts to reinforce peace between nations and to reach a joint understanding to bring peoples together. In this respect, the Kingdom of Bahrain supports all United Nations initiatives designed to establish common grounds between religions, in order to bring forward agreed religious and ethical values, which contribute to the building of humanitarian civilization, consolidating it, and allowing it to grow and prosper, so as to affirm the values of justice, equality and mutual respect, for the sake of human security and happiness.

The Kingdom of Bahrain also supports all humanitarian projects aimed at promoting the prosperity of humanity. It also supports the civilized visions designed to protect people and to ensure their security and stability.

The Kingdom of Bahrain considers the initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Places as a new vision to bring the peoples of the world, of different religions, closer together. This vision is a practical tool to treat the phenomena of extremism and hatred, on one hand, as well as addressing, on the other hand, unfounded fears of Islam and of Muslims. This initiative is a cultural framework, within which the biggest strategic issues are interconnected, and through which we can develop a climate that will bring success to many other international initiatives resulting from the bridges between religions, in order to arrive at our overriding goal – to bring peace throughout a world in which humanity is happy in its achievements.

Therefore, we propose the adoption of a world declaration by the United Nations, which would underline the role of religions in anchoring peace, justice and freedom in the world, as called for by

participants in Madrid and other recent fora on the issue. In this context, the Kingdom of Bahrain is keen to continue this dialogue and the historic initiative of the Custodian of the Two Holy Places, and is willing to host a General Secretariat for Dialogue Between Religions and Cultures, to be based in Bahrain.

Mr. President,

Our profound faith in the ability of peoples to coexist in peace, in spite of their diverse religions and sects, is due to what all these laws and cultures common ethical heritage, which calls for the protection of human rights, and the achievement of human security and happiness. We trust that our current meeting is, in fact, a continuation of the Conference on Religious Dialogue in Madrid, and is an effective contribution to the efforts the Custodian of the Two Holy Places, the United Nations, and all religious, intellectual, and political leaders, as well as international and regional organizations that support this initiative.

The Kingdom of Bahrain reiterates its willingness to contribute effectively to this progress, by all means and efforts, in order to achieve the desired goal of a world distinguished by mutual affection, dominated by justice, and which would achieve happiness, peace and security for all its peoples and societies.

Peace and Grace of God be upon you all.

Thank you, Mr. President.