



Permanent Mission of Germany  
to the United Nations

**Statement**

**by**

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**Agenda Item 45  
“Culture of Peace”**

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**(Check against delivery)**

Mr President,  
Mr Secretary General,  
Your Majesties and Royal Highnesses,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

On behalf of the Federal Government of Germany I wish to underline the great importance we attach to fostering a "Culture of Peace". Therefore, we welcome the convening of this summit.

Let me express my full support for the declaration of the European Union delivered by Alain Juppé on behalf of the French presidency.

Achieving and safeguarding peace and security, making a life in freedom and dignity possible for all people – these goals constitute the core of the United Nations' mandate.

These goals have not become any less significant in the year 2008.

On the contrary! Today they still require us to do everything in our power to reach them.

The last years have shown again and again that national and international conflicts demand more than just national, intergovernmental or international peace efforts – though they are and will remain necessary. Such political efforts at all levels need the support of a culture of peace within our societies - as well as between states - in order to ensure lasting success.

To achieve this culture of peace we require the efforts of the forces that hold our societies together. And this especially includes religious beliefs or other worldviews.

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

Ladies and gentlemen!

We can find impressive examples throughout history up to our time of people in all religions who, through their belief in an almighty creator, a just judge or a merciful father, were inspired to do great acts of humanity, to show compassion and love to their fellow human beings especially to those in need.

At the same time, in all religions we find examples of how they were abused for claims to political power or even claimed absolute political power themselves.

Yet even when religious convictions are misused to justify hate and violence, generally being suspicious of a certain religion or of all religious beliefs is not appropriate. For example: If Islamic terrorists and extremists distort their religion, this justifies in no way any kind of Islamophobia.

What is needed against any abuse however is the willingness of religions to engage in self-critical reflection on such distortions.

This willingness also has to assure that there is no room for condescending arrogance towards those of other faiths. So it can pave the way for mutual ethical conviction which lays the foundation for common service to peace, justice and the preservation of creation.

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

We have a common ground for assuming our common global responsibility.

At the same time, differences don't have to be denied!

The conviction that we all share more or less the same beliefs is not necessary for us to be able to respect others, or other cultures and religions. Our readiness to treat each other respectfully proves itself exactly in those moments where we are aware of and can clearly name the differences in our convictions and yet still view each other as equals.

Ladies and gentlemen!

"All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights." Today we are still committed to this principle, taken from Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

In consequence, those committed to universal human dignity, those who want to engage religious communities and believers of different faiths, as well as adherents to non-religious worldviews for a culture of peace must embrace freedom of thought, conscience and religion as it is laid out in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration.

Recognizing the significance of religious freedom in no way implies that other human rights are less important. But, when state power subjects religious services and the prayers of the faithful, the religious education of children or charitable actions to strict state control this expresses the totality of its claim to power even in the most personal aspects of everybody's lives.

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

It is also not acceptable to put the equal dignity and the equal rights of women in question on the ground of religious or ideological doctrine.

Time and again, religious feelings have been offended world-wide. I myself as a Christian have shared the bitter experience of my religious feelings being offended. However these violations never justify violence. The rule of law and respect for others' freedom of thought must also prevail in such difficult situations.

We cannot accept religious intolerance towards those who think differently. We commit ourselves to fight constantly any form of Anti-Semitism.

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

It is time to put an end to the harassment, terror and murder that forces members of religious minorities to flee their homes and countries.

Freedom of religion is about the individual's freedom to practice her or his religion or worldview alone or with others, publicly or privately.

And it is necessarily about the right of religious communities to organize themselves freely, to serve their members and to contribute to public life in all aspects. By this, they will play an important role for a culture of peace.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The diversity of world cultures and religions is a feature that has marked human development.

Considering worldwide migration and globalisation, regions that are shaped by only one religion are the exception.

Multiculturalism and multireligiosity are often a reality. Simultaneously the understandable desire to confirm and preserve one's own identity exists.

In this situation it is more vital than ever to provide young people in particular with the basics of a culture of peace – the understanding that all people have the right to equality and freedom. There is a need to make young people, and ourselves as well, aware of the silent harbingers of discrimination and religious intolerance, of how prejudice is stirred up or entire groups – people with another skin colour or with other beliefs – are stigmatized.

Respect for one another and interest in each other – this must be the basis of an inter-religious dialogue. Treating each other respectfully does not have to mean ruling out the search for truth. But what must be ruled out is forcing one's own beliefs upon others through violence.

In our societies, between states and at the level of the United Nations there have been numerous initiatives over the last decades for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. Politics can and should support these initiatives.

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

Important things have been happening in dialogues between religious communities for decades already. Jews, Christians and Muslims have learned much from and about each other in these

sometimes painful debates. The increased participation of other religious traditions, not least the great religious traditions of Asia, would certainly be welcomed in these dialogues.

When people can profess their faith without fear – especially if they belong to a religious minority –, when religious communities have the opportunity to participate in shaping human interaction in freedom, when all people no matter what their faith or worldview enjoy a common respect for their worth, that is when we will know we are moving towards a culture of peace.

Thank you very much for your attention!