



ITALY

**THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
AGENDA ITEM 45
“CULTURE OF PEACE”**

**STATEMENT BY
THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF ITALY
TO THE UNITED NATIONS
H.E. AMBASSADOR GIULIO TERZI**

(New York, Thursday, 13 November 2008)

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Thank you, Mr. President,

Allow me to express the appreciation of my Government and myself to you for convening this high-level meeting, and to thank the King of Saudi Arabia His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz al Saud, for undertaking this initiative.

Italy endorses the statement made yesterday by the Special Envoy of the President of France on behalf of the European Union, to which I will add a few comments.

For a country like Italy, located at the center of the Mediterranean Sea, dialogue with different cultures, civilizations, and religions is an essential element of its identity, rooted in the long history it shares with the States and Peoples of Europe, and with those on the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

Mr. President,

We understand the importance of inter-religious dialogue and the vital contribution religions and religious leaders can make towards achieving the United Nations' goals, such as peace-keeping and peace-building, the protection of human rights, and the promotion of social and economic development.

Our starting point should be to reaffirm the independence of religions and dialogue between them from any government interference. United Nations Member States should not influence the contents of this dialogue, but they can certainly promote and facilitate it.

We have to broaden the scope of our discussions from inter-religious dialogue to a wider, more complex inter-cultural dialogue, including an exchange between different religions, creeds, and philosophical, ethical and humanist traditions.

The objective must be to enhance mutual understanding and to welcome the natural existence of diversity. Building a system of tolerance, of respect for others, a system that rejects any violent abuse of power paves the way towards the "culture of peace" that is the subject of our debate in the General Assembly.

Mr. President,

Yesterday's and today's debate, in which so many Heads of State and Government took part, was eloquent proof of the great potential of inter-religious

and inter-cultural dialogue in contributing to peace and to the settlement of even the most complex political disputes. Through our different faiths and deepest philosophical convictions, we must strive to see our human affinities and translate them into a message of peace.

This is what I personally took from the words pronounced yesterday by His Majesty the King of Saudi Arabia, and by the President of the State of Israel, His Excellency Shimon Peres: the actual application of a “culture of peace”.

Quoting President Peres: “When nuclear weapons, long-range missiles, indiscriminate terror and fanatical incitement determine the agenda, we have to change the agenda”. The tangible and effective openness toward dialogue and exchange that we all perceived yesterday and today does not only convey a message of hope; it also constitutes a prerequisite for this change of agenda to become possible, and ultimately lead with the vital contribution of all sides – the parties in conflict, the States of the region, the international community as a whole – to a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East.

The path to reach a solution to this conflict is clearer today. As His Majesty King Abdallah bin Al Hussein of Jordan rightly stated yesterday “it is a political conflict, and it demands a just, negotiated solution... one that brings statehood and freedom for the Palestinians and security and more regional acceptance for Israel”.

Mr. President,

Italy, a founding Member of the European Union, has always supported the significant initiatives on dialogue between cultures and religions that have originated within the United Nations.

We are convinced supporters of the Alliance of Civilizations, which, as the Secretary-General mentioned, is gradually strengthening its effectiveness. Italy is an active member of the Group of Friends of the Alliance.

We similarly look forward to joining the consensus at the end of this session to approve the resolution on inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, promoted by the Governments of Pakistan and the Philippines. I would like to thank them for this initiative.

It is, however, important to underline that any real dialogue between cultures and religions must be underpinned by the recognition of the universality of human

rights, including freedom of religion, as enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Articles 18 and 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

Article 18 of the Covenant states clearly that freedom of religion not only means freedom to adopt and profess a belief, but also the freedom to worship, individually or in groups, both publicly and privately.

The Republic of Italy, having experienced the atrocities of World War Two, was founded on the recognition of these principles and values.

It is by virtue of this foundation that we cannot turn a blind eye to events that touch the deepest chords of peaceful coexistence. The Italian Parliament has thus recently approved guidelines that encourage the Government to remain steadfast in the fight against religion-based persecution and discrimination throughout the world.

Religious freedom is under threat in many parts of the world today, so the United Nations must focus its efforts and action on the protection and integrity of this fundamental right.

One of the greatest threats to religious freedom is intolerance. We strongly support the annual initiative of submitting to the General Assembly a Resolution on the matter, encouraged by the fact that this Resolution has always been approved by consensus.

Mr. President,

I would like to highlight, like the Secretary-General and other speakers did, the fundamental dimension of youth in dialogue between cultures. The success of any dialogue necessarily depends also on them. This is the belief that led my Government to set up a Youth Forum for Religious and Cultural Dialogue, with the purpose of encouraging young people to be leaders in supporting policies of tolerance among the various religions and cultural traditions.

Thank you, Mr. President