



**The Permanent Mission of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
To the United Nations – New York**

Speech by

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Delivered before

the United Nations General Assembly

On

Interreligious Dialogue

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(Please check against delivery)

Address by H.E. Giadalla Azuz Ettalhi
Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya
Before the United Nations General Assembly
On the subject of Interreligious Dialogue
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Mr. Chairman,

In its sixty-first session, the General Assembly adopted resolution 221/61 – “Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace” and emphasized, in its first paragraph that “mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and of the culture of peace”. This was reaffirmed at the sixty-second session of the General Assembly in resolution 90/62. The sixty-first session also adopted resolution 269/61 – “High-level dialogue on interreligious and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace”.

Consistent with this prominent trend and with the continuing concern of the United Nations, we welcome the convening of this high-level meeting today. We are convinced that there is a pressing need to intensify the dialogue between religions and cultures and to pursue this dialogue as a tool to effectuate the goals of the United Nations, as enshrined in the UN Charter and as reaffirmed by the Outcome Document of the Summit of World Leaders in 2005.

At the outset, we wish to commend the great efforts made in this regard by the United Nations, in particular by UNESCO and several regional and sub-regional organizations. Particular praise is due to the “Alliance of Civilizations” initiated by the governments of Turkey and Spain under the auspices of the United Nations, and we believe that these two countries, by dint of their history and geography, are well-qualified to play an influential role in the dialogue between religions and between civilizations and cultures.

Mr. Chairman,

We believe that the world is now in a critical stage: a stage in which it is imperative that we come to an objective and true understanding of each other. Over the last three decades we have witnessed significant events which have distorted ideas, and elements of the distant past are coming to the fore once more. Unfortunately, this has influenced the political actions of some people, resulting in wars, destruction and untold suffering to tens of millions of people around the world.

Mr. Chairman,

We must recognize, first and foremost, that the principle victim – though not the only one – of events and counter reactions, particularly after September 11th 2001, has been Islam, and Muslims in general. This is not the first time in history that Islam has been targeted as a result of misunderstandings or by the propagation of prejudice. But this decade has witnessed an unprecedented intensification of Islamophobia. Perhaps the First Observatory report of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, presented at the eleventh session of the Islamic Summit Conference in Dakar gives us the clearest and most honest assessment of this phenomenon. To quote that report:

"One of the major issues facing international relations today is the issue of Islamophobia. Islamophobia has existed since the time of inception of Islam. However, in recent years the phenomenon has assumed alarming proportions and has indeed become a major cause of concern for the Muslim world. Defamation of Islam and racial intolerance of Muslims in western societies is on the rise.....The Muslim world is particularly concerned because, while the overwhelming majority of Muslims strictly adhere to the principles and teachings of peace and tolerance, these vested groups of Islamophobes are giving a negative portrayal that Islam and Muslims are supportive of terrorism and extremism."

And perhaps the report of the Secretary General no.A/63/365 also provides further evidence of this.

Mr. Chairman,

We believe that the key to mutual understanding is dialogue. Perhaps documents such as the "Alliance of Civilizations - High-level Group" report issued in November 2006, or the "Amsterdam Declaration on Interreligious dialogue" and the "Astana Declaration", issued in October 2008, provide ideas which should be considered, and represent efforts which deserve encouragement and support.

Mr. Chairman,

We acknowledge the words of a Moroccan researcher. To quote that researcher:

"The causes of tension and conflict are not due to cultural differences, as long as they are simply visions for the world and for lifestyles and value systems ... Instead they are due to the spirit of domination."

The causes of tension and conflict in the world today stem from the fact that there are people who want others from other civilizations and cultures to become carbon copies of themselves. In practice, this means a rejection of dialogue and striving for domination: a path which can only lead to further tension in international relations.

Mr. Chairman,

Libya -which since the 1980s has hosted numerous meetings for dialogue between religions - appreciates all initiatives and efforts to further dialogue between religions, calling for acceptance of diverse beliefs and respect for such diversity. Libya believes that it is of the utmost importance to gain an understanding of other religions, so as to deepen our understanding of social and humanitarian realities. It is such knowledge which lays the foundation for mutual understanding, constructive coexistence and cooperation, so that we may create a world in which peace, progress and justice prevail.
