NORWAY

General Assembly
63rd Session
Plenary

Culture of Peace

<u>Check against delivery</u>

STATEMENT

By

H.E. Mr Morten Wetland
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

New York, 13 November 2008

President,

We believe that the UN is built on the assumption that it is dialogue and mutual respect that must govern relations between the peoples of the United Nations.

We are here to find shared interests and values, to bridge our differences and to settle them peacefully.

We are also the guardians of the human rights and the fundamental freedoms, of state rights, majority rights and not least minority rights that we have adopted in the course of 63 years. We are an organization where the strong shall be just and the weak secure.

The laudable initiative of Saudi Arabia, which has given us the opportunity to discuss dialogue between religions and culture for two days in this Assembly, comes at a timely place in history. Globalization, migration and information technology have made it clear to us that we have come so much closer to people and cultures that were perceived as being far away from our daily lives only decades ago.

We have not yet fully learnt to rejoice in the richness of diversity or to learn open-mindedly from the best of others. This is also the case in my own country, which is relatively new to the broad canvas of cultural and religious diversity, and where we are learning every day and working politically to integrate immigrant and refugees in a manner which is respectful of their identity and experience. We aim at becoming a fully inclusive society where everybody feels welcome and where everybody may live to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Although we believe that religious faith is an issue that belongs to the individual, and forms part of every person's identity,

Although we believe that all persons have the inherent right to change religious faith if their outlook so convince them,

That they should be allowed to practice their religion, or not to practice religion, without fear.

We also believe that religious communities have important roles to play in furthering dialogue and respect, between religions and between cultures.

When we come to the practical steps needed for an improved dialogue, we all need to start at home.

If future generations shall be more successful in living together and mutually respecting each other, we must teach them respect from childhood.

We need to look at what we teach them in primary school about other peoples, cultures and religions and we need to look at what we do not teach them. School curricula are essential.

As we prepare to celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we must be guided in our dialogue by the fundamental freedoms of that declaration.

We hold the firm view that freedom of religion cannot be achieved without freedom of speech. And freedom of speech is a prerequisite for any valuable dialogue. Since a dialogue is not a dialogue, but a shared monologue, if it does not encourage expression of different views, without fear.

In my country, we have established a Council for religion and life stance communities which meets with the government to exchange views. In the framework of the Council participants inform each other of issues of mutual interest, including how opinions and public expressions are perceived among people with different cultural backgrounds or religious affiliations.

We can have freedom of expressions and in parallel exercise caution so that we do not inadvertently or unnecessarily denigrate or disrespect what others hold dear.

This attitude is taught in all cultures, and practiced here in the United Nations every day. And it has nothing to do with censorship or legal restriction, only with human consideration and respect.

I conclude today with an example of that wisdom which I believe is universal. It is taken from the 1000 year-old Norse-Icelandic educational poem of Hàvamàl.

"Wise is he not who is never silent,
Mouthing meaningless words:
A glib tongue that goes on chattering
Sings to its own harm."

Thank you