



BRAZIL

**High-Level Meeting of the General Assembly
Under Agenda Item 45: "Culture of Peace"**

13 November 2008

**Address by H.E. Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti,
Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations**

(Check against delivery)

Your Majesties,
Your Highnesses,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Mr. President,

I wish to congratulate the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud, for the initiative of this high-level meeting. Building a culture of peace through dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions is a concrete way of giving effect to the principles and purposes of the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. I also welcome the significant contributions made by the Organization and a number of Member States to such dialogue through initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations, in which Brazil is particularly active. These efforts complement each other and the UN is well placed to help establish synergies among them.

As we all know, the relations among cultures and religions have a long history, one with bright spots and somber moments, just as human existence itself. Today the task before us is to help build on such history so as to bring about enhanced understanding, mutual respect and cooperation.

Achieving such a goal has become an imperative in a world not only globalized but also populated by increasingly diverse societies. In several countries, multiculturalism is not a choice, but a reflection of either complex historical processes or evolving social structures. Their long-term stability can only be achieved in an environment of peaceful coexistence of different cultural backgrounds. Their ultimate success as societies depends on their ability to progressively integrate all citizens into a larger whole, richer than the sum of its original parts.

A similar logic should prevail at the international level. The multiplicity of cultures certainly poses challenges. However, once the community of nations values cultural diversity as a sign of collective strength, those challenges will be more easily overcome. This is a task for which the United Nations seems particularly well prepared.

Building peace through religious tolerance and inter-faith dialogue is also an imperative in an age marked by both secularism and religious fundamentalism. The foundations of such dialogue rest on deep-rooted values shared by all religions: the pursuit of peace and virtue, human solidarity and the fundamental dignity of each and every individual. Today all creeds are also united in their refusal to be misused as political tools and as excuses to justify violence and extremism, in their willingness to overcome past prejudices and deepen their mutual understanding.

States have a role to play in supporting inter-religious dialogue and cooperation. By upholding the freedoms of thought, expression and religion, Governments help to create an environment of tolerance and understanding. By attaching equal importance to these fundamental freedoms and acting accordingly, public authorities show that liberty and the respect for religion can and must be reconciled.

Balancing civil liberties is not the only contribution that Governments can make to the harmonious coexistence of faiths. They should also address the underdevelopment and social exclusion that often compound conflicts among faithful of different religions. It is no secret that extremists of all kinds, including religious, thrive where material destitution and hopelessness invite intolerance and violence.

Such beliefs, Mr. President, rest on Brazil's experience as a nation and as a society. Ethnic, cultural and religious diversity lies at the very heart of our national identity. We know by experience that respect for diversity enriches and strengthens us. We know that the concurrence of populations from all continents, each with its cultural and ethnic backgrounds, and the peaceful coexistence of different faiths progressively instilled in our national character a strong inclination for accommodating the other and an aversion to all kinds of extremism. Communities of Jewish and Arab descent, for example, have always lived and do live today side-by-side, in harmony. This experience reinforces our strong support for the rights of the Palestinians to self-determination and to an independent and sovereign State, geographically coherent and economically viable, living side-by-side with Israel, within secure and recognized borders.

Other important contributions to a solid culture of peace in Brazil are the historic progress in reducing poverty and social inequality and our sustained efforts to improve basic and secondary education. We are convinced that more prosperous and educated citizens are less prone to intolerance and extremism. President Lula instituted 21 January as the National Day Against Religious Intolerance as a way to further strengthen the existing relation of mutual respect and understanding among different creeds and their followers in our country.

Mr. President,

It is on the key concepts of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and promotion of development and social inclusiveness that lies the foundation of a world where civilizations, cultures and religions can flourish peacefully side by side and cooperate for the good of all. Let us all renew our commitment to those powerful ideals and translate them into concrete actions.

Thank you.