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**STATEMENT BY
AMBASSADOR JOHN MCNEE
PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CANADA TO THE UNITED NATIONS
TO THE SIXTY THIRD SESSION OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
ON THE CULTURE OF PEACE [45]**

NEW YORK, 13 NOVEMBER 2008

**DÉCLARATION DE
L'AMBASSADEUR JOHN MCNEE
REPRÉSENTANT PERMANENT DU CANADA AUPRÈS DES NATIONS UNIES
À LA SOIXANTE-TROISIÈME SESSION DE L'ASSEMBLÉE GÉNÉRALE
SUR LA CULTURE DE PAIX [45]**

NEW YORK, LE 13 NOVEMBRE 2008

On behalf of the Government of Canada, I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia for their initiative in organising this Plenary Meeting on dialogue between religions and cultures.

Since its inception, the United Nations has provided a forum through which to bring the countries and people of the world together. It has promoted a constructive dialogue across cultures and faiths, which has contributed to greater mutual understanding. Initiatives such as this discussion demonstrate that the nations of the world recognise the importance of their shared responsibility to promote inter-cultural dialogue, an objective that Canada is proud to support.

While the world offers many examples of successful multi-ethnic, multi-faith, and multi-cultural communities that coexist and benefit from their interaction, too often such differences are considered grounds for competition or triggers for armed conflict. We must all work to change such mistaken perceptions. Diversity is a valuable asset and source of opportunity, not a threat.

Throughout Canadian history, the accommodation of regional, ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity has been critical to our overall health as a country. Many of the values that Canadians hold dear — freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law — have evolved through an ongoing dialogue among the cultures and communities that make up our diverse society.

Our openness to diversity and inter-cultural dialogue has strengthened Canadian society and enriched our culture. We have long benefitted from the cultural influence of English, French, and Aboriginal populations, as well as the skills, languages, cultures, religions, and other contributions of more than 200 ethno-cultural communities in Canada. This diversity is reflected in and reinforced by our official Multiculturalism Policy.

Canada fosters pluralism through laws, institutions and policies that promote the equal participation of all people in society. At the same time, we encourage people to retain their cultural, linguistic and religious heritage. We do this not just through our federal, provincial, and municipal governments, but through academia, the media, religious groups, community organisations, and civil society in general.

Of course, the promotion of pluralism and dialogue between religions and cultures must be pursued beyond national boundaries. Moreover, the international community must not limit its efforts simply to dialogue, but must also take concrete steps to promote increased inter-cultural understanding and respect for people of various cultural and religious backgrounds. This is why initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations that have identified practical measures in the fields of youth, media, education, and migration, are so important in combating the ignorance that can fuel cross-cultural misunderstandings. It was to further this objective that Canada partnered with the Aga Khan Development Network to establish the Global Centre for Pluralism in 2006. The mission of the Centre is to promote pluralism as a fundamental value and cornerstone of peace, stability and human development. Through these and other initiatives, Canada is committed to

working with the international community in order to strengthen inter-cultural dialogue and understanding around the world.

Since its inception, the United Nations has provided a forum through which to bring the countries and people of the world together. It has promoted a constructive dialogue across cultures and faiths which has resulted in greater mutual understanding. Initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Plan of Action for the World's Women are examples of the shared responsibility to promote inter-cultural dialogue, an objective that Canada is proud to support.

While the world offers many examples of successful multi-faith, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural communities that coexist and benefit from their interchanges, too often such initiatives are considered merely for competition or triggers for armed conflict. We must work to change such attitudes. Diversity is a valuable asset and source of opportunity, not a threat.

Throughout Canada's history, the accommodation of religious, linguistic and ethnic diversity has been critical to her overall health as a country. Many of the values that Canadians hold dear — freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law — have been shaped through an ongoing dialogue among the citizens and communities that make up our diverse society.

Our openness to diversity and inter-cultural dialogue has strengthened Canadian society and enriched our culture. We have long benefited from the cultural influence of English, French and Aboriginal populations, as well as the skills, languages, cultures, religions and other contributions of more than 200 ethnic-cultural communities in Canada. This diversity is reflected in and reinforced by our official multicultural policy.

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