

PERMANENT MISSION OF  
**CHILE**  
TO THE UNITED NATIONS



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**STATEMENT BY THE PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF CHILE, AMBASSADOR HERALDO MUÑOZ. UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY. ITEM 45: CULTURE OF PEACE. NEW YORK, 13 NOVEMBER 2008**

I should like first to welcome this valuable initiative taken by Saudi Arabia, which allows us to reflect in the General Assembly on the current state of the interfaith dialogue on the basis of the Madrid Declaration adopted in July.

This reflection is taking place a few weeks before we commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the “common standard of achievement for all peoples and nations”. Article 18 of the Declaration establishes that “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.” Another provision of the Declaration (article 19) recognizes that “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression.” These are complementary provisions which are at the centre of the current debate, like the equivalent provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

As noted by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, referring to the relevant provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, limitations to the right to freedom of expression and opinion are designed to protect individuals against direct violations of their rights and not to protect entities or belief systems.

We are glad that the Madrid Declaration recognizes respect for human dignity and promotion of human rights as a principle and also as one of the bases for building good relations among all peoples.

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In our view, the process launched in Madrid complements other initiatives launched under United Nations auspices, such as the Alliance of Civilizations and the process of the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace. My country is proud to participate in both initiatives.

Mr. President,

The role played by religion in the human rights discourse has acquired new relevance in recent years. My delegation believes that this role is derived from the recognition that human rights belong to the individual and not to abstract values or institutions. This recognition underlies the doctrine of universal human rights.

We are concerned about the approach that values religion and the objects of worship above individual rights; in the event of a conflict, this may mean that the latter are subordinated to the former for the sake of respect for a particular religion. A case in point is what is called defamation of religions. This approach could undermine the liberating character claimed by every religion, and may also find itself in opposition to human rights. As the Human Rights Committee stated in its General Comment No. 10, "restrictions on the exercise of freedom of expression ... may not put in jeopardy the right itself".

The suppression of freedoms or restriction of freedom of expression cannot be the automatic reaction of the authorities to isolated events affecting a particular religion, however regrettable or condemnable they may be.

What is needed is more freedom of expression and not less freedom of expression.

Mr. President,

We hope that initiatives such as today's will serve to build bridges and provide solutions to inter-cultural tensions. Solutions which, in this anniversary year, should deepen our commitment to the cause of universal human rights.

Thank you.