



PERMANENT MISSION OF FINLAND TO THE UNITED NATIONS
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ADDRESS BY

H.E. Tarja HALONEN
President of the Republic of Finland

on the occasion of
the 63rd Un General Assembly High Level Meeting on the Culture of Peace

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I am honoured to attend this high-level meeting summoned by the United Nations and the Kingdom of Saudi-Arabia. On behalf of Finland, I welcome the initiative of Your Majesty, King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud, to widen and deepen the dialogue among cultures, religions and faiths. I have come here with an open mind in the spirit of peace.

With the advent of globalization, the importance of national borders has decreased. Globalization has brought about more human contact, and today different people, cultures, civilizations and faiths encounter each other every day.

People have different opinions and beliefs. Increased interaction can promote understanding between people, but it can also strengthen prejudices and stereotypes. Attention is needed from all of us. Therefore it is only appropriate that we meet on theme "Culture of Peace" here – just here - at the United Nations.

After the shocking events of 9/11 in 2001, I initiated discussions with Christian, Jewish and Islamic religious groups in Finland. Since then I have seen and felt how these people who belong to different religions and cultures have, by respecting one another, acted as a unifying factor and resource in our society. I am grateful to them for this work. I hope that similar constructive phenomena have been experienced elsewhere as well. The political leaders of a country cannot take the whole responsibility, but encouragement and guidance are needed.

How to analyse the situation, and to solve the conflicts is important in the whole society, including homes, schools and work places. Peace building is needed always and everywhere.

Finland has been during her history in wars and conflicts like most of the European countries. During the Finnish Presidency of the European Union in 2006, on our initiative, a network of voluntary cooperation on intercultural and interreligious issues was established. In the network representatives of EU organs and Member States have worked on new ways and means to cultivate good relations among cultures and religions. This challenging work continues.

One of the basic and most comprehensive sources of human rights is the Universal Declaration on Human Rights, written and approved by consensus at the United Nations in 1948. These days we celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Declaration. It emphasizes human dignity and equality and establishes a solid basis for dialogue between various cultures and civilizations.

Finland is committed to the universal values, rights and freedoms included in the Declaration. For us it is also a Declaration on Responsibilities: it is our responsibility to respect and observe the universal human rights in full and everywhere.

The Declaration offers equal and universal human rights to all humans - men and women, believers and non-believers. It has been and still is a great source of inspiration to combat discrimination and marginalization everywhere.

The dispute between Israel and the Palestinians is often mentioned as a key issue, symbolizing the breach between the West and the Muslim world.

Finland welcomes and supports serious initiatives to solve this dispute. It is generally acknowledged that any solution must be based on a two-state model and on reaching agreement on the status of Palestinian refugees and on Jerusalem. Nevertheless, there is no instant formula for peace. Finding a solution requires negotiations, and we all know that these are always influenced by national and international political situation.

Finding a negotiated solution requires political will and courage, above all on the part of the Israelis and the Palestinians. I consider it self-evident that Israel must immediately cease building settlements and that the Palestinians must cease their violent attacks on Israeli targets.

Other countries and organizations should above all support the negotiations and refrain from doing anything that hinders them. Any agreement reached by Israel and the Palestinians must be good enough for everyone else.

This meeting stresses the importance of the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue in today's multicultural and multi-faith world. We hope that this meeting can serve a source of inspiration for people, religious communities, civil society, and authorities on all levels to engage in inter-religious dialogue.

We are invited to move into a new era of respect for a variety of convictions. We are challenged to recognize the universal spiritual and human values of the religions that have shaped our common world. We have to do our part today in order to provide for a better world for generations to come.

Thank you.