



Guatemala

Check against delivery

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE UNITED NATIONS

Agenda Item 45: CULTURE OF PEACE

STATEMENT BY

H.E. Ambassador Gert Rosenthal
Permanent Representative to the
United Nations

New York, November 13, 2008

Permanent Mission of Guatemala to the United Nations
57 Park Ave. New York, NY. 10016
Tel. (212) 679-4760 - Fax. (212) 685-8741
E-mail: guatemala@un.int



*Misión Permanente de Guatemala
ante las Naciones Unidas*

HIGH-LEVEL MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATEMENT OF THE DELEGATION OF GUATEMALA

Agenda Item 45: Culture of Peace

12 November , 2008.

Mr. President,

My delegation applauds with satisfaction the celebration of this important dialogue to promote and apply the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace and to foment dialogue and cooperation between religions and cultures.

Therefore, in thanking you for the organization of this meeting, we wish to give testimony to our appreciation to King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz for his important initiative, reflected, among other aspects, in the event celebrated in Madrid last July and now this meeting, aimed at promoting a dialogue between religions and cultures. This initiative undoubtedly will encourage bringing nations together, in the best spirit of the Charter of our Organization, and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It also complements the Universal Declaration of UNESCO on Cultural Diversity, which affirms that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee to achieve peace, as the value intrinsically united to the respect of the dignity of individuals.

Mr. President:

I come from a country where we know first-hand of the tragic consequences of intolerance, be it the product of ethnic, religious, social or ideological differences. One of the underpinnings of the Peace Accords that put an end of almost four decades of fratricidal conflict is the forming of a multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual society. This determination, which shapes our domestic policies, also orients our foreign policy. It is due to this reason that we value the recent initiatives of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to foment dialogue, and even, in a separate category, to contribute to a firm, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.

A Culture for Peace is without a doubt a tool that should be divulged massively, which requires strengthening education. It is for this reason that in the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace it is the very first action we must



*Misión Permanente de Guatemala
ante las Naciones Unidas*

promote within the eight spheres of action identified. Thus, we must begin by eliminating the content that incites hate, distortions, prejudice and negative biases in school textbooks and other written educational material. The objective of promoting the respect for different religions and cultures must be incorporated into the message of those books. Education must be at the service of understanding, tolerance, mutual respect and coexistence.

On the other hand, our cultural and religious diversity must be considered as a valuable asset of our societies, as well as an engine for development and progress. In my own country, the Peace Accords contain very concrete provisions that defend the Mayan world view and beliefs, and that protect their sacred sites.

In our delegation's opinion, closely linked to the first sphere of action mentioned before is the need to update and revise education and cultural policies so that they reflect a human-rights based approach, guaranteeing equality between men and women, encouraging democratic participation, promoting understanding, tolerance and solidarity so that these spheres of action impact favorably on sustainable economic and social development which respects cultural diversity.

We reaffirm that in the area of education, UNESCO must be the lead agency within the United Nations System to promote and apply the Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace and non-violence for the children of the world, which should not end in 2010, but rather should become a form of life in peace, without violence.

Cultural diversity has been elevated justly to the category of the common heritage of humanity; it is a living heritage, and therefore renewable, as decided by the Universal Declaration of UNESCO on Cultural Diversity, whose adoption is a clear example of our categorical rejection of a thesis that predicts an inevitable clash between cultures and civilizations. In this regard, we appreciate the fact that in June of 1996, our Nobel Peace-Prize Laureate, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, was designated by UNESCO as an Ambassador of Goodwill for the Culture of Peace, in recognition of her struggle in favor of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples and for her dedication to reach the ideals and objectives of the Organization. Also the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was recognition of the inherent value of human diversity.



*Misión Permanente de Guatemala
ante las Naciones Unidas*

Guatemala has also supported initiatives such as the Alliance of Civilizations, the activities of the Tripartite Forum on the Cooperation between Religions in favor of Peace and Development, and the Manifesto in favor of Life, Peace and Equality which has already been signed by more than 75 million persons. All of these initiatives and the groups that head them are a testament of the importance of dialogue, the rejection of the misuse of religions on the part of extremist groups that foment racism, discrimination, xenophobia, and all related forms of intolerance. As the President of last year's General Assembly said, "if religions are not part of the solution, they will continue to be part of the problem."

Finally, we believe that May 21, declared Cultural Diversity Day, and September 21, International Peace Day, should be better acknowledged so that their celebration be utilized to disseminate knowledge on other cultures, paving the path towards peace and security in the whole world, without distinction of any type, and with justice and equity. As the Culture of Peace Manifesto states: "Together, we can transform the culture of war and violence into a culture of peace and non-violence."

Thank you.