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**STATEMENT BY H.E MR. HAMIDON ALI, PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF MALAYSIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS, ON AGENDA ITEM 45: CULTURE OF PEACE AT THE PLENARY MEETING OF THE 63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS, NEW YORK, 13 NOVEMBER 2008**

Mr. President,

I wish to express our appreciation to you and the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques His Majesty King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Saud of Saudi Arabia for the effort in elevating this plenary meeting of the General Assembly to consider agenda item 45, Culture of Peace to a high-level event. This effort contributes to our common goal of building a culture of peace, tolerance and understanding, and builds upon previous initiatives undertaken by the United Nations on this matter. Malaysia is fully supportive of efforts at the international level which are designed to generate greater understanding between cultures and civilizations.

Mr. President,

2. Our world continues to be besieged with conflicts; among nations and among peoples, despite our world's progress into modernity and democracy. Culture, ethnicity, and religion are abused by some to highlight the differences among us, and to transform these differences into divisions – as opposed to celebrating them as the beauty of the diversity amongst peoples. Yet the conflicts that spawn from these differences in our world today remain political in nature and reflect some of the socio-economic gaps of our globalised world.

3. Malaysia believes that we need to be mindful of the political dimensions *vis-à-vis* the divide among societies and nations. In particular, this includes conflict situations in different regions of the world, and the need to reach final and just solutions. Though there remains disagreement by some quarters, it cannot be put aside that inter-cultural divides are very much influenced by the global political scene. We need to address these political root causes as increased access and exposure to images and information can be easily used to either perpetrate these divides or help close them.

4. Building a culture of peace is also aided through ensuring that people are free from the socio-economic wants in life, such as having access to food, shelter, education, and decent work; as well as stability, and control over their own future. In this



respect, we need to ensure that the right for development is pursued and made tangible, and that inequality gaps in income and opportunities among countries and within societies are overcome.

Mr. President,

5. Societies in general tend to take self-centric views of themselves – viewing other peoples and cultures from the perspective of their own benchmarks and philosophies – while sometime imposing their values onto other societies and creating as a result an atmosphere of acrimony and distrust amongst peoples. We are witnessing now a dangerous trend of a growing schism between different cultures and religions, which, if not addressed properly, would present a serious threat to international peace. As a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious country, Malaysia understands very well the challenges the world would be confronted with if this dangerous trend is not reversed.

6. Among others, we are witnessing a growing rise in the phenomenon of Islamophobia, and the legitimisation of this in political circles, in the sphere of public opinion and in society at large, and as a result of resurgent activities by political parties and associations established on the basis of racist, xenophobic and perceived ideological superiority. The defamation of religions as a result of this is a real phenomenon and we disagree with the notion that defamation of religion is not an infringement of the human rights. Defamation of religion constitutes a derogation of the right of belief as it is inextricably linked to incitement to racial and religious hatred. The notion of defamation of religion and freedom of opinion and expression are not mutually exclusive or incompatible. It is our view the issue is not one or the other, but ensuring that respect for both can be balanced in conceptual, as well as legal and practical terms. This is one area in which the international community should focus on instead of debates on the righteousness of one over the other.

Mr. President,

7. Initiatives such as the holding of this Plenary meeting at a high-level, the Alliance of Civilizations, the Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and others are important dimensions of the international commitment towards the promotion of inter-cultural, inter-civilizational and inter-religious understanding and cooperation. Malaysia supports such initiatives and believes that the positive interaction among peoples of diverse cultures and values will help to achieve the aim of preserving and promoting global peace and stability, which are necessary prerequisites for the promotion of sustainable economic and social development.

8. While we are fostering dialogue at a high-level in these past two days, we also need to focus our subsequent work at ensuring that this interaction flows to the local and grassroots level. We need to translate our ideas and thoughts into practical measures. Member States, the United Nations system and civil society all have important and complementary roles to ensure that this can become a

reality. Partnership with civil society, including non-governmental organizations and the private sector, will greatly enhance our mutual efforts towards promoting inter-cultural, inter-civilizational and inter-religious understanding, and represents the determined will of the international community to cooperate for peace.

9. In the past few years, many other initiatives have been undertaken to promote inter-cultural, inter-civilizational and inter-religious dialogue. These include efforts at the international, regional and national levels – sometimes organized and convened by states, and sometimes by agencies within the United Nations systems, or by civil society. These efforts are applauded and welcomed. Malaysia feels that the United Nations is the international body best placed to coordinate these efforts and can take a leading role.

Mr. President,

10. As part of our inter-cultural, inter-civilizational and inter-religious dialogue, all actors need to ensure that we multiply the bridge-builders as well as to focus on the common values that we share. We need to approach dialogue with mutual respect from all dimensions, including ethnicity, culture, religion, as well as mutual respect for different countries and nationalities. Once more, political viewpoints should not cloud our common values.

11. We need to always bear in mind that all belief systems, in essence, extol the virtues of tolerance and peace; that each and every society has to evolve a democratic system that suits them while retaining its essential principles; that labeling creates confusion rather than clarity and in some cases, labeling can be deemed an insult; and that long-lasting issues which continue to plague humanity and which can act as a rallying cause for extremism must be resolved in a fair, just and balanced manner.

Mr. President,

12. Malaysia remains convinced that the culture of peace lies with mutual understanding, respect and tolerance among religious, cultures and peoples. For this to happen, we as members of this body, must work hand-in-hand towards achieving this goal for peace and prosperity of our world.

Thank you.