



PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

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STATEMENT

BY

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PERMANENT MISSION OF NIGERIA TO THE UNITED NATIONS

AT THE

63RD SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY HIGH-LEVEL MEETING

ON AGENDA ITEM 45: CULTURE OF PEACE

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 13, 2008

Mr. President,

On behalf of the Nigerian delegation, I congratulate you for presiding over this High-Level Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue, Agenda Item 45, on the Culture of Peace. I also congratulate His Majesty, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al-Saud of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for initiating this meeting aimed at deepening the dialogue among cultures, religions and faiths in order to seek solutions to the myriads of problems facing the world.

Mr. President,

As the world continues to shrink into a global village in response to the forces of globalization, we are faced with increasing contact between peoples of different cultures, race and religion. Our differences call for greater interaction through dialogue in order to bring about mutual understanding without which we would continue to experience the consequences of ignorance.

Mr. President,

Nigeria is very passionate about the dividend of peace. It is perhaps only natural for Nigeria to continue to encourage the promotion of a culture of peace not only because we are a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, but also for the fact that over the years, we have learnt to co-exist as one, despite our cultural, linguistic and religious diversity. While this may not have been without its challenges, our country has become the better for it by learning to accept each other, as the same people, despite our differences. Thus for us, Nigeria is an embodiment of "unity in diversity", a slogan that has come to be appreciated by all Nigerians.

To this end, the Nigerian Government has established the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC) with the mandate of promoting and fostering tolerance, understanding and solidarity amongst the major religious groups in Nigeria. Furthermore, many states in the Nigerian Federation have established similar inter-faith councils with the deliberate objective of fostering tolerance and understanding. Additionally, the Federal Government has established relevant agencies with support mandate to foster tolerance, understanding and solidarity. These agencies include the National Boundary Commission, Border Area Development Commission, and the National Orientation Agency.

Mr. President,

From our perspective, the strategy for building a culture of peace should focus on multifaceted and broad parameters, including the promotion of understanding of each other's ways of life; device means of resolving ongoing conflicts so as not to degenerate further; development of institutional frameworks and relevant capacities for peace initiatives; mobilizing resources at national and regional levels for peace initiatives.

We also believe that the media could assist by targeting programmes that promote peace and religious tolerance and dialogue among all faiths with a view to preventing the defamation of religious and cultural values. We in Nigeria believe that it is possible for peoples of all faiths to co-exist in peace and harmony. We hold dearly the right of every citizen to free speech, the freedom of religious practice and healthy respect for each other's convictions. We therefore wish to call for

continuous inter and intra faith organizations' meetings, periodic organization of seminars on topical issues that will facilitate the elimination of intolerance, disunity, conflicts and violence.

Mr. President,

The issue of promoting peace and understanding through mutual dialogue, tolerance and respect for each other requires a collective effort. It is therefore pertinent for all of us to join hands in this endeavour in order to propel our world towards a more peaceful and prosperous one. We should also unite to de-emphasize the agents of strife and conflicts amongst us while we pay greater attention to those issues that create harmonious atmosphere, in order to guarantee for all the peoples of the world, their full and fundamental human rights especially, as we mark the 60th anniversary of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR).

We are convinced that our diversity has been put together for us by the divine creator for our benefit and not for our destruction, for our strength and not for our weakness. For peace and not war. But until we see it as such, it will continue to be a negative force rather than a positive one which we all talk about and desire. We need to put in more efforts towards promoting interfaith dialogue, as we believe that it will bring about an understanding of our differences and enable us to tap into our rich and cultural diversity. It will overcome intolerance and hatred and all false notions about our different ethnic, cultural and religious affiliations so that we can truly live together in an atmosphere of peace and love.

Mr. President,

In conclusion, let me share with you the concluding remarks of the First Prime Minister of my country at the 15th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on 7 October 1960 on Nigeria's assumption of membership of this organization.

"Just one week ago, the clocks were striking midnight and Nigeria was on the threshold of independence. There was a brief ceremony at which the leaders of three different faiths each said a brief prayer. We then realized, all of us, that however, much we might imagine ourselves to be responsible for the happy occasion to independence, we realize that, above all, there is a divine Providence, and I do honestly believe that one primary essential for international friendship and cooperation is for each man to be true to his religious beliefs and to reaffirm the basic principles of his particular creed. It may be that then, when we hear the world crying out for peace, we may receive the inspiration to deal with these intractable problems and be ready to devote all our resources to the advancement of mankind by applying those persistent eternal truths which will inevitably persist long after we ourselves are utterly forgotten."

I thank you.