



PHILIPPINES

STATEMENT

BY

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF THE
PHILIPPINES

ON AGENDA ITEM 45: CULTURE OF PEACE

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Mr. President:

Thank you for inviting us to this meeting of the General Assembly. And congratulations to King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and King Juan Carlos of Spain for drawing attention to the World Conference on Dialogue in Madrid last July.

In that conference, Their Majesties brought together Jews, Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and representatives of other religions in the hope of promoting understanding and tolerance among followers of the world's faiths. This is also the hope for this meeting here in New York.

The Philippines fully supports this initiative because we take a great interest in promoting world peace and in encouraging greater cross-religion exchange.

Allow me at the outset to introduce Draft Resolution No. A/RES/63/L24/L24^{REV.1} entitled "Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace," tabled jointly by the Philippines and Pakistan and co-sponsored by a number of states. This draft resolution emerged as a consensus text after a series of consultations.

Among the salient points of the resolution is the affirmation that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute an important part of the alliance among civilizations and of the culture of peace.

The resolution encourages the promotion of dialogue among the media from all cultures and civilizations. It emphasizes that everyone has the right to freedom of expression. It reaffirms that the exercise of this right carries with it special duties and responsibilities necessary for respect of the rights or reputations of others, protection of national security or of public order, or of public health or morals.

The resolution requests for the proclamation of a UN decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace.

I commend the resolution for adoption at the close of our plenary meeting tomorrow. This will demonstrate once again our solidarity for the promotion of interfaith dialogue as a powerful aid to ensure durable peace worldwide.

The resolution is especially relevant to the United Nations under the leadership of His Excellency Ban Ki-Moon because for the first time the Secretary-General has issued a report on interreligious and intercultural activities.

The UNESCO also works on interreligious dialogue....

Mr. President:

Regrettably, the story of faith has too often been twisted into a source of despair and destruction among peoples and nations. There are those who wish to instigate religious war. There are those who use faith to divide rather than unite us. They

camouflage their evil designs by invoking religious prejudice in the hope of heightening a clash of civilizations.

In this era of propaganda on the clash of civilizations, we must especially pursue broader interfaith dialogues to promote solidarity. Our challenge is to redeem the true meaning of our faith if we are to truly bring peace and prosperity to the world. We must make this challenge an opportunity to forge religious understanding.

But we must not mistake tolerance and understanding of other faiths and belief systems as a blank check for abuse. We will never accept violence cloaked in religion by anyone at anytime....

Mr. President:

The Philippines has actively advocated interfaith dialogue.

Interfaith dialogue is an official policy of the Philippine government. It is also a historical truth among our diverse peoples and beliefs. Faith is ingrained in the lives of our people. It is the primordial seed of humanity. It offers hope, confidence, courage and commitment to make a better global neighborhood.

As we integrate interfaith understanding in development policy, it becomes more effective in resolving conflict.

Our archipelago of more than 7,000 islands has had its share of religious strife, ethnic tension and violence.

For years we have worked to achieve peace in Mindanao.

The Peace Process in Mindanao was recently dealt a setback by violence carried out by lawless renegade elements of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. But we are fully committed to the peace process. There is no alternative to peace. We are working to reach as much progress as possible on peace within the parameters set out by authentic dialogues with communities. However, before we can effectively reactivate the peace process again in earnest, we must first bring stability back to the island, restore order and be able to trust that responsible elements of the MILF have regained control.

Religious leaders can speed up dialogue and reconciliation. They are our partners in the peace-making process.

The historic divide between the Christians and Muslims in our country is narrowing dramatically. This is in no small part due to our focus on interfaith dialogue and a willingness to accept the sincerity of those who differ with us in faith.

The Bishop and Ulama Conference is our format for interfaith dialogue. It is a movement of Catholic and Christian bishops and Muslim ulamas organized to promote mutual understanding of faiths and religions for peace.

We all want to see peace and prosperity in the Philippines. Through interfaith dialogue under the leadership of the Bishop and Ulama Conference; through global engagement with the largest possible international involvement, including the UN, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Indonesia, Libya, Malaysia and others in the Organization of the Islamic Conference, Spain, Sweden and the EU, the US, Japan, Australia and other bilateral ODA partners; and through economic assistance at the community level, we are confident that peace will happen.

Mr. President:

Three years ago, we had the honor of chairing the first Summit on Interfaith Dialogue here in the UN.

At the regional level, we are one of the convenors of an ongoing series of Asia-Pacific interfaith dialogues that began in Indonesia in 2004. Subsequent dialogues were held in the Philippines in 2004, New Zealand in 2007 and Cambodia in 2008.

Presently, we are preparing to host the Special Non-Aligned Movement Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and Development scheduled in May 2009.

Our participation today in this initiative on culture of peace advances our relationship with Middle Eastern and Islamic nations. Their support in carrying out our interfaith dialogues has been critical to our progress in promoting peace in southern Philippines.

What we are doing together here today and tomorrow is every bit more powerful than bullets, military tanks and armaments to fight those who bring misery and violence to people at home or across the globe. We must follow our faith and have faith in each other if we are to truly lift up the poor, transform war into peace and stamp down the intolerance and hatred wrought by a false reading of the divine message.

We maintain high hopes in inter-faith dialogue as a means for building bridges to replace barriers between communities of different cultures and ethnicity.

We are here today united by our faith and determined to bridge the valley that unnecessarily divides us, whether we live across the street, across rivers, or across oceans and continents. We can and must bridge the divide through the alliance of civilizations so that we can advance the common good of humanity.

Let us embrace the power of the dialogue here today and tomorrow—for peace, development and human dignity.

Let us adopt Draft Resolution No. A/63/L.24^{Riv.1} on the "Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace."

Thank you.