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Statement By

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At the

**The High Level Plenary of the UN General Assembly
On
"Culture of Peace"**

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بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Mr. President,

His Majesty, King Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz Al Saud,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to thank the President of the General Assembly for convening this High Level Meeting on “Culture of Peace”, one of the most pertinent issues of our time. Most of all, may I thank the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, His Majesty King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, for his dedication to the cause of interfaith dialogue, and for initiating this event. There is nothing more important than the elimination of the scourge of extremism, xenophobia and hatred, which can only be possible through dialogue and cooperation.

Ladies & Gentlemen,

We are meeting here today to affirm that all religions in our world reflect and nurture humankind’s inner desire for peace and self-realization. Despite our different faiths, peoples of various religions have lived together in peace and harmony all over the world.

And where there has been a conflict or confrontation in the course of human history, it has not stemmed from religion, but from the pursuit of narrow political objectives of adherents of every religion or every political ideology.

Sadly our understanding of each other is sometimes marred by certain misconceptions, particularly in regard to such phenomena as bigotry, terrorism and extremism and whether they are rooted in our religious convictions. Many associate terrorism with religion, others give it credence by explaining it as a reaction from the East against the West, all failing to grasp the phenomenon in its real nature.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Nothing could be further removed from a plausible causal connection with terrorism than religion. The terrorism we know is political rather than theological. The terrorism we know is the historical product of bad politics and the reckless pursuit of narrowly defined interests.

These are not textbook observations; I have the history of my country to illustrate my view. Terrorism has never been a religious phenomenon in Afghanistan. Indeed, terrorism is an international and regional phenomenon, rooted in a complex historical context, spanning over the past four decades. The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in the 1980s, the subsequent misuse of religion for political objectives, and the deliberate promotion and utilization of extremism as a bulwark against the Soviet threat; are important factors that have collectively produced the phenomenon of terrorism we are facing as an enemy today. Al Qaida and other terrorist networks, as we know them today, are residues of a reckless past – a past that all of us around this table today, must own up to and rectify.

Therefore, excellencies, religion is not the source of terrorism. The term ‘Islamic terrorism’, which is frequently used to describe acts of brutality and violence, is fundamentally misleading. Islam, a religion of peace and moderation, not only condemns unequivocally any act that violates the life and property of an innocent individual, the Holy Koran has, in fact, equated murdering an innocent person to the killing of all humanity. Far from being complacent in terror, Muslims have actually been among the most afflicted victims of international terrorism.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, for the world to rectify the failings of the past and reverse the threats against peace and co-existence, dialogue, understanding and mutual acceptance is the way forward. At the same time, we must also counter the few discordant voices that preach hatred and division and misuse the name of religion to mask their pursuit of rather political goals. We must ensure that the voice of peace and tolerance – prevails.

To overcome misperceptions, we must also educate and inform our populations about the differences and commonalities of our cultures. I have long rejected the notion that we face a “Clash of Civilizations”. We are instead confronting a world that seems to have shrunk in size by the forces of globalization. We should appeal to our media to educate and to build bridges between us rather than equating differences with incompatibility, threat and fear. We should approach the diversity of our cultures as having given our world, its colorful and vibrant beauty.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Afghanistan over the past seven years has been a powerful case for the prospect of a genuine cooperation among civilizations aimed at achieving common goals. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, United States of America, Japan, China, India, Iran and Pakistan are engaged in supporting our efforts to rebuild Afghanistan and they have even engaged in joint projects such as building our National Ring Road starting from the East to the West of the country. Indeed, our future in a peaceful world lies in the extent to which cooperation among civilizations, as exemplified in Afghanistan, can become the rule and not the exception.

His Majesty King Abdullah,

I am truly honored to be here today to underscore the importance of an international effort to promote tolerance and mutual acceptance and to fight extremism. We fully support you in your efforts to promote interfaith dialogue and tolerance. Our great religious traditions and the basic tenets of our faiths must guide us. We must all remember the words of our Holy Books, and we must conquer our basic instincts for fear and hatred.

It is our great hope that dialogues such as the one in Madrid and today in New York will serve to make us all aware that peace, tolerance and respect are the heritage of all of us, and that extremism of all kinds is rooted, not in religion, but in the reckless pursuit of narrowly defined political interests.

To emphasize the oneness of mankind and to break all barriers, the celebrated Persian poet, Sa'adi, famously said:

Human beings are members of a whole,
In creation of one essence and soul.
If one member is afflicted with pain,
Other members uneasy will remain.
If you have no sympathy for human pain,
The name of human you cannot retain.

Thank you