

9 November 2001

**Statement of H.E. Dr. Han Seung-soo,
President of the 56th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Dialogue among Civilizations**

Excellencies and Distinguished Guests,

At this meeting of the General Assembly, we are discussing what the United Nations should and can do to promote understanding and dialogue among civilizations. The General Assembly, recognizing that this question is closely bound up with issues of peace and security, economic prosperity and human rights, which are central to the work of our Organisation, has taken up and considered the item since the 53rd Session in 1998.

Since then, the General Assembly has adopted several important resolutions regarding this item and the Secretary-General has reported on the implementation of the resolutions. However, as we near the end of the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, I believe it is appropriate and timely for the General Assembly to provide a strong impetus for further progress in this vital area.

In particular, we expect that the resolution titled "Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations" will be adopted by consensus after today's debate. It is my view that the Global Agenda, if adopted, will mark a milestone in our efforts to promote dialogue among civilizations.

Over the course of millennia, humanity has developed and nurtured a wealth of cultures and civilizations. From the beginning of history, they have interacted with and enriched each other, while contributing to the progress of humankind as a whole. As globalization accelerates and is driven forward by advanced technologies, the process of cultural interaction and exchange is also accelerating.

The United Nations designated the year 1995 as the United Nations Year for Tolerance and proclaimed 2001 as the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations. Indeed, tolerance and dialogue should be included among the core values of the international community. Without them, peace and security cannot be achieved and would hardly be worth achieving. Moreover, they are instrumental to the pursuit of human rights and human freedom.

We find ourselves at a critical juncture of history. Along with the advent of the age of globalization, terrorism has now surfaced as the major of threat to international peace and security. Terrorism represents the very embodiment of intolerance and hatred. All great civilizations and religions in history preach tolerance and compassion. Thus, dialogue among

civilizations, by promoting tolerance, undermines the basis of terrorism, and thus contributes to global peace and security.

In our globalizing and increasingly inter-connected world, diverse cultures can provide a needed source of stability and continuity. The challenge is to balance this need against the risk of cultural stagnation. There is no simple solution. But we must always remember that cultures are living, evolving entities, not lifeless artefacts. I hope this is one of many important lessons that the Dialogue has taught us.

In this regard, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the eminent persons from all over the world who have come here to address this assembly. I have no doubt that their presentations will do much to make this Dialogue one of the United Nations' foremost contributions to cross-cultural understanding.

In closing, let me express my gratitude to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran for its initiative in proposing this agenda item. I wish all the participants a very productive and successful dialogue, thus advancing the goals and ideals for which the United Nations stands.

Thank you.