

THIRD INFORMAL THEMATIC DEBATE OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY DURING THE 61ST SESSION

Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: obstacles and opportunities

I. Introduction

The President of the General Assembly, H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, invited Member States and observers to an informal thematic debate of the General Assembly “Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: obstacles and opportunities”, on 10 and 11 May 2007. In her opening remarks, the President of the General Assembly characterized the informal thematic debate as a genuine attempt:

“ ... to understand the realities we live in and analyze more fully the reasons behind the increasing levels of conflict, alienation, extremism and fear in the world, so that we can lay a solid foundation for a genuine dialogue between cultures and religions and bridge the rift that is on the verge of deepening”.

Addressing the meeting, the Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon underlined the:

“... urgent need to rebuild bridges and to enter into a sustained and constructive intercultural dialogue that stresses common values and shared aspirations” for which the Assembly provided a unique platform, and that he awaited the outcome of the meeting which would “inform his thinking and help guide the work of the UN”.

The debate consisted of four interactive panel discussions:

- Respect for Cultural Diversity as a Prerequisite for Dialogue
- Religion in Contemporary Society
- The Responsibility of the Media
- Civilizations and the Challenge for Global Peace and Security

II. Panel discussions

1. Respect for Cultural Diversity as a Prerequisite for Dialogue

Respect for cultural diversity as a prerequisite for dialogue was widely supported. It was also acknowledged that this by itself was not sufficient to achieve meaningful intercultural dialogue. Beyond respect and tolerance, three other factors were required for dialogue: recognition of the other’s otherness; recognition of the legitimate assertion of the other’s identity; and openness to the transformative effect dialogue can have on identity.

Many underlined the need for greater respect, tolerance and dialogue among cultures, religions and civilizations; that the process of globalization had provided greater opportunities for interaction, but had also increased the “otherness of others”. Cultural diversity was viewed as a global asset that enriched everyone. The possibility of “unity in diversity” was also stressed. In this sense, the use of the word “civilizations” could be misleading as humanity has a common civilization.

While religions could be instrumentalized, for good or bad purposes, it was wrong to confuse religion with culture, as most religions were trans-cultural. Education was mentioned as the most effective tool for countering intolerance. Some also stressed the importance of universal human rights.

The role the UN in fostering and deepening dialogue was discussed. Dialogue could play an important role in the maintenance of peace and conflict prevention, though many suggested that dialogue could never substitute for conflict resolution.

Recommendations

- the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations should play a prominent role in promoting meaningful intercultural dialogue.
- create an umbrella structure within the United Nations to promote the Alliance of Civilizations initiative.

2. Religion in Contemporary Society

The role of religion as a powerful source of identity both historically and in contemporary society was highlighted. In that context, the importance of dialogue among religions, as a key to developing a global identity and a sense of global citizenship, was emphasized. It was also noted that true dialogue can only take place among parties that view each other as equals, and that fostering space for such a dialogue was needed.

Many noted the manipulation of religion for political purposes. In view of the tendency of institutions to claim the right to maintain their own structure and precepts, the challenge for religious institutions to engage in more effective dialogue was noted. Absolutist views, fundamentalism, and ignorance of the history and culture of diverse religious groups were also highlighted as obstacles. Some challenged religious and cultural leaders to motivate their followers to engage ‘others’ more reasonably and with greater mutual respect, while remaining true to themselves and their own beliefs.

Noting that conflicts and tensions arose from believers, not from the religions themselves, the need to improve adherence to the core values of one’s own tradition was signaled. Recognition of the impact of recent history, notably the transition from colonialism to independence, was underscored as a missing component in most debates on the role of religion in contemporary society. It was also acknowledged that dialogue and non-

violence were the appropriate vehicles for addressing challenges, such as poverty and oppression.

It was emphasized that academic analyses of religion in contemporary society take into account the views of the members of the religion in question, and avoid simplified explanations based on superficial understanding.

The adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was cited as an important example of how inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogues can indeed overcome great challenges and contribute towards building peace.

The role of the United Nations in fostering greater awareness among the broader public at the local, national and global levels was widely supported, including by members of the NGO community who expressed their commitment to work through the established mechanisms, with Member States, to further the debate.

Recommendations:

- religious communities should be encouraged to build bridges at the local level, in order to counter extremism.
- the United Nations should hold regular debates with religious movements and academics, so that decision making processes are better informed by those who can offer a critical perspective and provide in depth knowledge of the history, culture, ethnic and religious specificity of the society in question.
- leaders and educators should find resources *within their own traditions* for promoting respect and tolerance.
- the tools made available by information technology should be utilized more effectively to promote greater dialogue and understanding, especially among young people.
- the Secretary-General should appoint an Adviser on Religious matters.

3. The Responsibility of the Media

Many participants noted that the media had a responsibility to support and encourage dialogue in an ethical manner, especially since for many people the media was the biggest source of knowledge about the world. The importance of public debates was emphasized.

The need to give high priority to media literacy in the context of the rise of interactive network journalism (e.g. radio phone-ins, web forums and blogs) that create active spaces

for discussion was suggested. The need for better education and training of journalists was highlighted. The new world of online media was seen as a positive structural development. However, participants deplored the current technological divide, with vast parts of the world still lacking internet access.

Some cautioned against “political correctness” by the media as this would not allow for the true communication and permanent dialogue that was necessary. There was a discussion about whether “the media fed the flames or extinguished fires” and therefore if it was leading the world towards greater understanding or towards greater strife.

There were divergent views about the appropriate relationship between governments and international organizations and the media. Some participants cautioned against the risk of infringing on the universal principle of freedom of expression, arguing that the role of the media should be defined by the media and not by governments or by international bodies. In this context, the existence of large media corporations was seen as a guarantee of press freedom. Meanwhile, the presence of many small media operators was also seen as a sign of the vitality and independence of the press.

Central in the debate was the question of the press’ objectivity, as well as media ownership. It was stressed that the ideal role of the media was to present information in an objective fashion, leaving the public to form its own opinion. In practice, however, journalists worked for corporations with interests. The question was therefore raised about how that affected the objectivity of journalism.

Recommendations

- adopt a universal, international code of conduct to ensure that the media enjoy their freedom of speech with a sense of ethical responsibility.
- priority should be given to investment in media literacy given the various technological transformations that are underway.

4. Civilizations and the Challenge for Global Peace and Security

The view that all human traditions, cultures, civilizations and religions together form one human civilization was expressed. The role of education in promoting diversity and fostering a sense of belonging to one human community was emphasized. In addition, it was acknowledged that diversity was a strength which all of humanity can benefit from; and that each person has multiple identities which society must respect and allow to flourish. In a similar vein, it was noted that perceived differences in ethnicity must be consciously unlearned to prevent hatred and the denial other people’s humanity, an attitude which could eventually lead to cases of genocide, as recent history has demonstrated.

It was pointed out that to achieve results, education must be complemented by concrete efforts to alleviate inequalities. Many supported the view that global economic

inequalities were an important source for extremism. It was proposed that the United Nations prepare a study on circumstances under which extremists are recruited. Some, however, argued that ignorance was the main source of the current predicament between the “West” and “Islam” and that extremists on both sides reinforced each other.

Participants called for collective efforts in order to reduce tensions within and between nations. It was emphasized that the world was not doomed to witness a clash of civilizations. There was unanimous recognition that extremism was unacceptable in any form and that more needed to be done to counter it.

Many speakers expressed concern over the use of religion as a cover to legitimize violence. The need for political solutions based on the strict adherence to international law was seen as a guarantee against double standards. The virtue of dialogue as a means to counter extremism was stressed.

It was suggested that the United Nations Security Council should hold a debate on the so-called clash of civilizations. Both support and opposition to this proposal was expressed. It was indicated by some that the right forum for such a debate should be the General Assembly. Some speakers noted that the debate focused solely on the “Abrahamic faiths” and that other religious traditions, especially from Asia, had been neglected. It was therefore pointed out that a dialogue of civilizations must encompass all cultural and religious traditions.

Many speakers welcomed the appointment by the Secretary-General of a High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and expressed support for his work. The announcement of the first World Forum on the Alliance of Civilizations devoted to young people which would be convened in Spain before the end of this year was well received.

Finally, the role of the UN as an indispensable forum to debate this important matter and to take collective measures with a view to mitigating the negative impact of extremism on societies was recognized.

Recommendations

- efforts to promote education as an effective means to fight ignorance must be pursued;
- conduct a UN study on the sources of all forms of extremism, at both national and international level;
- a fruitful dialogue of civilizations must encompass all cultural and religious traditions;
- the UN, given its unique convening power, must continue to promote dialogue between civilizations and religions with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society and the NGOs.

Annex A

Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly
Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: Obstacles and Opportunities
10 and 11 May 2007
Trusteeship Council Chamber, United Nations

Introductory statements by the President of the General Assembly, the Secretary-General and Panelists are available online at;

<http://www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/thematic-civilizations/programme.shtml>

Thursday 10 May

10.00 AM-10.30 AM

- **Opening Statement by the President of the General Assembly**
- **Statement by the Secretary General of the United Nations**

Panel 1 - *Respect for Cultural Diversity is a prerequisite for Dialogue*

10.30 am - 1.00 pm

- Dr. Ghassan Salame
Professor of International Relations at Sciences Po University, Former Minister of Culture of Lebanon
- Rev. Canon Dr. Trond Bakkevig
Pastor of the Lutheran Church of Norway
- Ms. Fatemeh Keshavarz-Karamustafa
Professor of Persian and Comparative Literature
Chair, Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages & Literatures
University of Washington
- Ms. Regine Boucard - Moderator
West African Museum Program, former President of the World Bank Art Society

Panel 2 – *Religion in Contemporary Society*

3.00 pm – 6.00 pm

- Mr. Mohamed Arkoun
Emeritus Professor of the History of Islamic Thought at the Sorbonne
- Mr. Manish Kasliwal
National Chairman, Young Jains of India
- Ms. Mary Ann Glendon
Learned Hand Professor of Law, Harvard Law School
- Dr. Hune Margulies
Director, the Martin Buber Institute for Dialogical Ecology
- Mr. Robert Thurman – Moderator
Chair, Department of Religious Studies, Columbia University

Friday 11 May 2007

Panel 3 – The Responsibility of the Media

10.00 am – 1.00 pm

- Ms. Robin Mansell
Professor of new Media, Head of the Department of New Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science
- Dr. Mohamed Al Rumaihi
Professor of Political Sociology, Kuwait University
- Ms. Mona Siddiqui Professor of Islamic Studies and Public Understanding, University of Glasgow
- Mr. Warren Hoge - Moderator
New York Times, United Nations Bureau Chief

Panel 4 – Civilizations and the Challenge for Global Peace and Security

3.00 pm – 6.00 pm

- Mr. Souleymane Bachir Diagne
Northwestern University
- Mr. Amre Moussa
Secretary-General, League of Arab States
- Ms. Karen Armstrong
Author on religion, television broadcaster
- Mr. Shashi Tharoor - Moderator
Author and Former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information

Concluding remarks by the President of the General Assembly

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Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: Obstacles and Opportunities

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Author and Former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information

Concluding remarks by the President of the General Assembly

SIDE EVENT:

Roundtable Discussion on the Arts - *How can the UN better use the arts in further developing strategies to bridge the gaps between cultures?*

Date: Friday 11 May 2007

Time: 1.15 pm -3.00 pm

Venue: Conference Room 6

Panelists:

Mr. Richard Gluckman
Gluckman Mayner Architects

Mrs. Karen Brooks Hopkins
President, Brooklyn Academy of Music

Dr. Lisa Koenigsberg
Founder and President, Initiatives in Arts and Culture

Dr. Paul LeClerc
President and Chief Executive Officer, New York Public Library

Mrs. Gail Dexter Lord
President, Lord Cultural Resources

Moderator:

Mr. Michael Kimmelman
Chief Art Critic, The New York Times

10 May 2007

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the 3rd Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly on
“Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: Obstacles and
Opportunities”**

Secretary-General,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,

Allow me, first and foremost, to express my deepest gratitude to all of you for accepting our invitation to participate in this thematic debate on "Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: Obstacles and Opportunities."

Your presence at the United Nations today is momentous, because your different affiliations, perspectives, and intellectual pursuits represent the breadth of human experience and the hopes of many for a brighter future.

This debate is the third of its kind. The first was a thematic debate on development and the second was on gender equality and the empowerment of women. What has compelled us to hold this debate is the desire to understand the realities we live in and analyze more fully the reasons behind the increasing levels of conflict, alienation, extremism, and fear in the world. In doing so, we can lay a solid foundation for a genuine dialogue between cultures and religions and bridge the rift that is on the verge of deepening.

We must ask ourselves: How can we face and overcome the misunderstanding that characterizes the world we live in today and protect our rich heritage? It is our obligation to act quickly to put an end to preconceived ideas and to mutual fears. Only then will we rise above our differences and together build a better future for all.

Friends,

One of the main reasons behind the state of insecurity and instability in this world is a perceived lack of justice: the feeling that one's dignity has been violated; the feeling that the principles and values that have been agreed upon internationally are not applicable to all.

The only means to address this is through more intensive dialogue on two levels in tandem: at the political and diplomatic level, and at the cultural and social. It is important to recognize that culture is not merely a means of coexistence and reconciliation, but also an instrument for development, progress and prosperity.

Fortunately, dialogue among cultures has taken precedence on many foreign policy agendas and has been at the forefront of the United Nations agenda since its inception. In fact, 2001 was devoted to this topic and was named "the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations".

Our meeting today is an extension of this effort and goes hand in hand with the UN Charter that calls for: "respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion".

Friends,

We must put a stop to the misuse of religion in contemporary society, and reject extremist ideologies that severely threaten peace and understanding among nations and peoples.

We must ask ourselves: How is it that wars are waged, injustice is justified and 'the other' is outcast, all in the name of religion? It is absurd and regretful that religion is being abused. This situation must be changed, because all religions share the message of love and brotherhood; these human and spiritual elements remain the essence of all religions.

We must stand together, now more than ever before, and ascribe common meaning to our existence and humanity. This is the prerequisite for peace. This is the responsibility of each and every nation, and each and every citizen. Non-governmental organizations, civil society, and the media all shoulder this responsibility as well.

It is a heavy burden that requires projecting a balanced view of all cultures by rejecting stereotypes and preconceptions, and promoting a spirit of tolerance. Only then will we be able to promote peace amongst all peoples.

We are in the midst of an information revolution where the wealth of knowledge that is at our fingertips is unfathomable. We must see to it that our educational curricula encourage critical and creative thinking that one can apply to the self before engaging with the other; for how can we engage with others, discover their beauty, their similarities, and their differences if we cannot look within ourselves first? This methodology of reflection and self-criticism is the basis for real dialogue.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The leading causes of instability in our world are poverty, disease, armed conflict both within and among states, intolerance and clashes amongst civilizations, cultures and religions. Addressing these challenges requires first the acknowledgement of their existence. Then we can agree on the most effective ways to tackle them in order to achieve global peace and security.

I wish you a fruitful exchange during the next two days. I would like to conclude by thanking everyone that has taken part in supporting this thematic debate and its related events. Allow me to express my deepest appreciation for the support we have received from the governments of Italy, Norway, Denmark and Germany, as well as the "Alliance of Civilizations" initiative, and the Islamic Development Bank.

The cooperation of all these various groups is a reflection of the importance of dialogue. This is what we should always strive for. And, it should be the basis for our future events.

Thank you all..



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

20 March 2007

Excellency,

I have the honour to invite you to the third informal thematic debate of the Sixty first Session of the General Assembly, on *Civilization and the Challenge for Peace: obstacles and opportunities*. The debate will be held on 10 and 11 May 2007, in New York.

The main objective of the debate is to unravel the reasons behind the increasing level of mistrust among people of different religions and cultures; and, to discuss the relationships between cultural and religious differences and conflicts.

The meeting will bring together Member States, a number of prominent intellectuals, representatives from non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society drawn from all over the world, with expertise in religion, politics, literature, science and the humanities.

The informal thematic debate will consist of four inter-active panel discussions on: *Respect for Cultural Diversity as a prerequisite for Dialogue; Religion in Contemporary Society; the Responsibility of the Media; and, Civilizations and the Challenge for Global Peace and Security*.

For your ease of reference, I am enclosing a background note and the provisional programme for the thematic debate.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Haya Rashed Al Khalifa". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Haya Rashed Al Khalifa

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

CIVILIZATIONS AND THE CHALLENGE FOR PEACE: OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Introduction

The main objective of the debate is to unravel the reasons behind the increasing level of mistrust among people of different religions and cultures; and, to discuss the relationships between cultural and religious differences and conflicts.

This thematic debate will build upon the various initiatives undertaken at the United Nations to promote human dignity and peaceful relations among nations, including through a genuine dialogue among civilizations and religions.

The meeting intends to go beyond mere gestures of intent to formulate tangible ideas that can catalyze dialogue between and within different cultures and civilizations. It will attempt to contribute towards a vision that can foster pluralism, mutual understanding and equal participation, rather than discrimination and marginalization. In order to achieve a productive outcome the debate will have to ask how cultural and religious differences have exacerbated levels of mistrust.

Along side Member States, the meeting will bring together, a number of prominent intellectuals, representatives from non-governmental organizations, the private sector and civil society, drawn from all over the world, with expertise in religion, politics, literature, science and the humanities.

Panel Discussions

The debate will involve four main Panel Discussions.

1. Respect for Cultural Diversity as a prerequisite for Dialogue

In this era of globalization, the challenge before us is to ensure that cultural diversity becomes a source of fecund and collective enrichment and not the basis for misperception and conflict.

Respect for all cultures and religions, taking into consideration their specificities, is a prerequisite for a productive dialogue. The challenge today is to ensure that cultural diversity leads to fruitful exchanges that are beneficial to all of humanity.

Today, migration represents a major phenomenon in our global world. It presents considerable challenges, but also has the potential to create mutually beneficial opportunities for greater cultural and religious interaction.

Diversity is now a prevailing feature of modern societies. In order to address common challenges confronting humanity, our collective effort should focus on drawing people together rather than on what divides us.

More emphasis should thus be placed on promoting universal values, respect for human rights and dignity, including the collective heritage of humankind. Modern technology can facilitate greater exchange of ideas, which could contribute towards bolstering dialogue among and within cultures and civilizations. In this context, it is important to protect and encourage creativity, support cultural endeavors, artistic expression in all fields and to give room for cultural dissemination and exchange.

2. Religion in Contemporary Society

Religious fundamentalism poses a serious threat to peaceful relations and understanding among peoples and nations. The challenge today is to ensure that religious freedoms and beliefs - fundamental human rights - do not contribute to the rejection of those who are different, social domination, or even violence.

In a world of increasing diversity where more and more peoples of different religious and cultural backgrounds are living together, it is crucial that social policies encourage religious and cultural interactions in a free, respectful and tolerant environment. The discussions should emphasize programmes at local and multilateral levels promoting knowledge of and interaction between religions of different backgrounds and beliefs.

Such programmes should aim to enhance mutual understanding and emphasize a culture of peace to support harmonious relationships among peoples and uphold human dignity for all.

3. The Responsibility of the Media

The media could have an extremely important role to play in the promotion of peace. Information technologies allow events in one part of the world to be instantly beamed into our living rooms. The impact the media can now have upon our perceptions of Others has reach an unprecedented scale.

The right to freedom of opinion and expression also carries responsibilities. The media should strive to broadcast a balanced view of all cultures by tackling stereotypes and prejudice and promoting tolerance and mutual understanding. By focusing on the real challenges facing humanity, in an objective and transparent manner the media can also contribute towards fostering peaceful relations among peoples and nations.



THE PRESIDENT
OF THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

24 April 2007

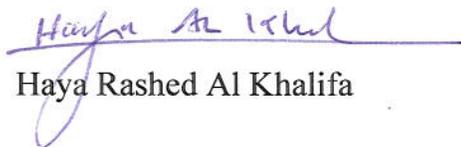
Excellency,

I have the honour to bring to your attention the program for the informal thematic debate of the General Assembly on 10 and 11 May 2007, on *Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace; obstacles and opportunities*.

The program includes the list of confirmed panelists for the four interactive panel debates. Please be advised that short bios of the panelists can be accessed on the President's website:

<http://www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/thematic-dialogue.shtml>.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.


Haya Rashed Al Khalifa

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York



7 May 2007

Excellency,

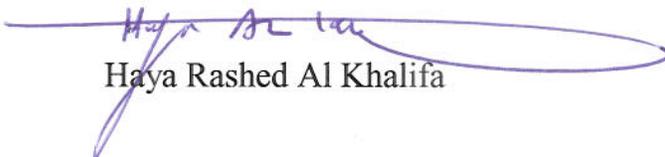
I am writing with regards to the third informal thematic debate of the General Assembly, entitled '**Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace; opportunities and obstacles**', on 10 and 11 May 2007 in the Trusteeship Council.

Please find attached the final programme and a list of ECOSOC accredited non-governmental organizations that have been invited to participate. In view of feedback from Member states, this informal thematic debate will adopt a more interactive format based around four Panel debates. I would therefore encourage all Permanent Representatives and Observers to actively participate in the panel discussions in order to enrich and focus the debates.

On Thursday 10 May from 6:15-7:40 p.m., esteemed pianist and composer Mr. Abdel Rahman El Bacha will perform a recital in the General Assembly Hall. This will be followed by a reception in the Delegates Lounge. May I also draw your attention to a roundtable discussion on the role of the arts in bridging cultural differences, which will take place at lunchtime on 11 May.

I look forward to your active personal participation in the panel discussions. I believe the informal thematic debate is an important opportunity for this organization to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges we currently face in the world.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.


Haya Rashed Al Khalifa

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

Informal Thematic Debate of the General Assembly

Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: Obstacles and Opportunities

10 and 11 May 2007

Trusteeship Council Chamber, United Nations

Thursday 10 May

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- **Statement by the Secretary General of the United Nations**

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Professor of Political Sociology, Kuwait University
- Ms. Mona Siddiqui
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Panel 4 – *Civilizations and the Challenge for Global Peace and Security*

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Northwestern University
- Mr. Amre Moussa
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- Ms. Karen Armstrong
Author on religion, television broadcaster
- Mr. Shashi Tharoor - Moderator
Author and Former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information

Concluding remarks by the President of the General Assembly

SIDE EVENT:

Roundtable Discussion on the Arts - *How can the UN better use the arts in further developing strategies to bridge the gaps between cultures?*

Date: Friday 11 May 2007

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Venue: Conference Room 6

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Gluckman Mayner Architects

Mrs. Karen Brooks Hopkins
President, Brooklyn Academy of Music

Dr. Lisa Koenigsberg
Founder and President, Initiatives in Arts and Culture

Dr. Paul LeClerc
President and Chief Executive Officer, New York Public Library

Mrs. Gail Dexter Lord
President, Lord Cultural Resources

Moderator:

Mr. Michael Kimmelman
Chief Art Critic, The New York Times

**Non-Governmental Organizations invited to the thematic debate of the General Assembly on
Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace, to be held on 10 - 11 May 2007**

Baha'I International Community

Dr. Sovaida Ma'ani

Committee of Religious NGOs

Mr. Jeffery Huffines

Fundación Cultura de Paz

Mr. David Adams

IAUP/UN Commission on Disarmament Education, Conflict Resolution and Peace

Prof. Karl Grossman

Muslim American Society Freedom Foundation

Mr. Ibrahim Ramey

Soka Gakkai International

Mr. Hiro Sakurai

Temple of Understanding

Sr. Joan Kirby

UNESCO Chair in Interfaith Studies

Mr. Josef Boehle

United Methodist Church

Ms. Kathleen Stone

United Religions International

Ms. Monica Willard

World Conference of Religions for Peace

Mr. William F. Vendley

Mr. Stein Villumstad



12 June 2007

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to enclose herewith an informal summary of the proceedings of the informal thematic debate on “Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: Obstacles and Opportunities” that took place on 10-11 May 2007.

As you may recall, the main objective of the debate was to unravel the reasons behind the increasing level of mistrust among people of different religions and cultures and to discuss the relationships between cultural and religious differences and conflicts.

The discussions focused on respect for cultural diversity as a prerequisite for dialogue, religion in contemporary society, the responsibility of the media and civilizations and the challenge for global peace and security.

I was encouraged by the open and frank exchange of views which took place during the informal thematic debate, and would like to sincerely thank all Member States and invited guests for their support and active participation.

A number of recommendations emerged from the four interactive panel discussions and should be carefully considered for action, as appropriate. For your ease of reference, a web-cast of the debate and the panellists’ contributions can be found in the official website of the President of the General Assembly¹.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.

Haya Rashed Al Khalifa

All Permanent Representatives and
Permanent Observers to the United Nations
New York

¹ <http://www.un.org/ga/president/61/follow-up/thematic-civilizations/programme.shtml>