

21 September 2006

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-Level Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace**

Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased to be among you here at this High-Level Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace. I would like to thank His Excellency Dr. Alberto G. Romulo, Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Philippines for inviting me to this important event. I wish to sincerely congratulate the people and government of the Philippines for their commitment to this endeavor.

The noble objectives of this Conference which aims at enhancing interfaith cooperation, promoting a culture of peace and dialogue among civilizations as well as translating shared values into practical action to achieve sustainable peace are invaluable. They are and will continue to be guiding principles and a source of inspiration for me throughout my tenure as President of the General Assembly.

At the 2005 World Summit our leaders reaffirmed the importance of initiatives that promote dialogue among cultures and civilizations including interfaith dialogue, which in my opinion are no longer a luxury but a necessity of our time.

In this regard, the launching of the Alliance of Civilization by the Secretary General on the 14th of July 2005, was a timely and vital initiative.

Even before this important matter was formally discussed by the General Assembly, the numerous conferences and meetings under the auspices of the United Nations helped bring people together from all over the world. They offered nations and people opportunities to exchange views and ideas, thus establishing the General Assembly as the most appropriate and universal tribunal for an effective dialogue among civilizations. We have adopted numerous resolutions; that promote the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, or religious minorities; combat the defamation of religions; and eliminate all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief.

Yet there is more to be done as our world remains subject to misconceptions and mistrust leading to tensions and violence. We need to forge stronger partnerships between the Member States, the United Nations and religious communities. We also need to promote a people to people dialogue. In fact an interfaith dialogue is needed not only among governments but also civil society within and between nations. We need to think creatively to examine how such exchanges could not only

foster a culture of peace but also advance progress in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

To think that any one of us can become secure, while others are not, is purely an illusion. Everyone must be engaged in this process to fight misperceptions and stereotypes that isolates "the other" and triggers violence. This can only be achieved by quality education and conscientious media that cultivates understanding, tolerance and cooperation. I cannot but emphasize this enough.

Let us work together to free the peoples of the world from violence, terrorism and war that is reaching pandemic proportions and taking various forms. Let us embrace a more tolerant and more balanced approach to religion, one that advocates forgiveness and compassion. In this era of interdependence and globalization, it is time that people reach out to one another and live together in harmony and peace, as we all belong to one large human family.