

4 March 2009

**Statement of Mr. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann,
President of the 63rd Session of the General Assembly,
to the Coalition in Support of the Initiative for a UN Decade of Interreligious and
Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace**

Dear Sisters and Brothers,

I warmly welcome all of you to this house, to the United Nations, an organization of governments where your voices, as representatives of civil society organizations, must also be heard.

When I learned last August about this initiative promoting a General Assembly proclamation of a “UN Decade of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace” from 2011-2020, I welcomed it with enthusiasm for several reasons.

First, this is a grassroots initiative, emerging from civil society organizations. It has now become a global effort and will undoubtedly bring a needed breath of fresh air here at UN Headquarters.

Secondly, you are coming to the United Nation with a proposal for partnership with a vast constituency –the Brothers and Sisters of the religious communities, faith-based organizations and value-based secular groups around the world. I am convinced that partnerships between our 192 Member States and organized civil society are the only way we are going to successfully meet the overwhelming challenges that threaten our very existence here on our dear, abused Mother Earth.

And third, you promise to mobilize these immense spiritual, human and organizational resources in pursuit of peace -- a common aspiration of all humanity, a shared value for virtually all religions and a core goal of the United Nations.

You – and I say now we -- are looking for sustainable peace; a peace based on justice, increasing solidarity among individuals, peoples and nations, and growing respect and appreciation of our cultural and religious diversity.

Finally, you understand that high-level meetings and wise declarations are not enough. You want to go further and use the proposed Decade to build new action-oriented partnerships with the United Nations, its Member States and other constituencies of the civil society. You envision a decade of collaboration on the UN's central concerns, among them the Millennium Development Goals, the deepening of a culture of respect for human rights, decent work for all, dialogue among civilizations, and promoting global commitment to peace and nonviolence.

Last November, during its remarkable session on a Culture of Peace, the General Assembly adopted the resolution 63/22 which requests that the UN Secretariat facilitate the consideration of the possibility of proclaiming a United Nations decade for interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. That guarded request was an important step forward. At that session I stated: “...while we do, obviously, have differences in our religions and theologies, we are very much united in our essential values. Just as important, we must apply these values if we are to survive the consequences of the convergence of man-made crises that we face at this critical historical juncture.”

I am sure that you understand that, because of the current global economic turmoil, the General Assembly, indeed the entire United Nations family of organizations, is focusing its attention on the confluence of crises that challenge us. Our immediate interventions must ensure that the world’s most vulnerable – those who are the least responsible for the meltdown – are spared what could be an unending catastrophe of unimaginable proportions. Nevertheless, the establishment of this broad Coalition in support of this initiative is by itself an important step forward and will enhance your capacity to respond to the challenges posed by the crises in the longer term.

I appreciate that you have created this coalition not for fighting a war, as other coalitions have done throughout history, but for helping to build a genuine and lasting peace. You are mobilizing not for battle, but to build more equitable, fraternal and harmonious societies, respectful of human rights and all life around us. Yours is a coalition in which dialogue, cooperation and agreements will displace all forms of violence in the solution of conflicts.

Sisters and Brothers. Please be assured that I share your vision and appreciate your determination to engage yourselves in this noble and challenging undertaking in partnership with the UN and its Member States. I promise you that you can count on me.