

22 December 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
on the Occasion of the start of the 40-Day Countdown to
World Interfaith Harmony Week**

Statement attributable to the spokesperson for the President of the General Assembly

As the President of the General Assembly of the United Nations, it is my privilege to draw your attention to the resolution that the Assembly adopted in 2010 reaffirming that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace and proclaiming the first week of February every year as the World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs. The Week was first observed in February 2011.

In our conflict-ridden world, I believe it is important to recognize the historical good done by people of all faiths in many of the areas of the work of the United Nations as well as the current successful partnerships in various parts of the world between UN agencies and religious groups particularly in meeting the humanitarian needs of disaster-stricken people. Such partnerships are indicators of the common ground that exists among religious organizations, and all of us who strive for peace and human development.

This common ground will form the basis for the special observance of the World Interfaith Harmony Week being planned by my office in cooperation with civil society on 7 February in 2012 in the UN General Assembly Hall.

The program will provide the opportunity for representatives of various religious communities, faith-based organizations, followers of wisdom traditions and indigenous peoples, to share their insights in relation to topics that concern all of us as member states. In particular, I encourage the speakers to speak to the ways in which spiritual and religious communities may support and augment the mission of the UN in several key areas of our work:

- The mediation of conflict: the world's religions have significant capacity to encourage dialogue, tolerance, forgiveness and reconciliation, and can therefore be of service in the effort to prevent and resolve conflict;
- Disaster prevention and response: with extensive grass roots level work in many nations, in both rural and urban areas, the world's religions can and do play a significant role in mitigating the effects of natural disasters;
- Sustainable development: All religions teach of respect for the environment, and thus the world's religions have much to contribute to efforts to promote sustainable development;

- Revitalization of the United Nations: improved mutual respect and cooperation between the UN and the world's religions can bring about a "win-win" opportunity, as they can serve as friends, allies and partners in service to the UN mission."

I hope that all Member States who supported the decision of the Assembly in 2010 whole-heartedly will participate in this important program. I also call upon Member States to undertake and encourage activities in their nations in observance of the World Interfaith Harmony Week from 1-7 February 2012. I trust that people of all faiths and traditions will participate in advancing the goal of interfaith harmony and to lift up what is good in both their own religion and the religion of others.

The recently-concluded Fourth Doha Forum on the Alliance of Civilizations has inspired me immensely in making this call to the international community to promote respect for diversity and pluralism regardless of religion, race or ethnicity. It is this spirit of mutual respect that will afford us a firm building block in the establishment of a global culture of peace, a climate of hope and healing to address the challenges that confront our world today.