

7 February 2012

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the World Interfaith Week “Common Ground for the Common
Good”**

Madam Deputy Secretary-General,
Your Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my privilege to address you today in observance of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

First, I would like to offer special thanks to his Majesty, King Abdullah of Jordan for his initiative for interfaith harmony, and for the successful adoption of the Resolution 65/5 in November 2010, proclaiming the first week of February every year the - World Interfaith Harmony Week - at the United Nations.

Let me also commend Member States for adopting in October 2010 the resolution that proposed World Interfaith Harmony Week as an annual event.

In doing so, Member States underscored the centrality of interfaith cooperation as an important condition for building a culture of peace.

Billions of people around the world identify themselves as believers. One is hard-pressed to find any society, culture or civilization which has not been shaped to some extent by religious values and practices.

In today's interconnected yet divided world, it is more important than ever to draw on religion's potential in the promotion of peace and stability.

The theme for today's program is Common Ground for the Common Good.

Each faith has its unique identity, traditions, and practices.

At the same time, we recognize and celebrate the values that are shared across religious traditions. These common principles form a common ground that unites us in our rich diversity.

During World Interfaith Harmony Week, we not only affirm our own traditions, but reflect on the qualities and values of the traditions of others.

It is this spirit of mutual respect and cooperation that will afford us firm building blocks for the establishment of the culture of peace at all levels.

In many instances, religious organizations provide care and basic services to the world's vulnerable communities. Their efforts have long pre-dated the existence of international development cooperation as we know it today.

For this reason, it is important that the United Nations acknowledges the social and moral significance of faith.

For the United Nations itself was built on the quest for universal values such as peace, freedom, human rights, dignity, and the oneness of humanity.

These principles have been translated by Member States into the Charter of the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Here in this General Assembly Hall, where nations gather at a common table of dialogue, issues of faith have rarely been discussed in any systematic way.

Recently, however, there has been a greater trend toward dialogue with religious and interfaith organizations at the United Nations. I believe this dialogue should be encouraged.

For there is not only a common ground that binds faithful traditions together, but also a common ground on which religions and the United Nations stand, sharing values and principles.

This common ground includes respect for human rights as set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; affirmation of the equal value of all human beings; the importance of compassion and service to others; and the universal aspiration for peace.

Faith-based organizations have worked in partnership with the United Nations, often in areas of great risk or hardship. Just as the broader NGO community has been a loyal and effective partner and ally to Member States, faith-based organizations play a valuable role in advancing the UN's goals.

With this understanding, I will convene on March 22 a one-day interactive thematic debate on "Fostering cross-cultural understanding for building peaceful and inclusive societies".

This debate will draw on the fruitful discussions at the Fourth Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, held in Doha in December 2011.

The event will be organized in partnership with the Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat.

During the meeting, we will also discuss the role of religions and religious organizations in enhancing dialogue and understanding, with participation from different parts of the world.

Ladies and gentlemen,

To build world peace, we must first find peace within ourselves.

As former Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld rightly said “Unless there is a spiritual renaissance, the world will know no peace.”

The continuing and varied challenges that we encounter in our work can be better addressed if we take inspiration from the spiritual values in our common endeavors.

Dear friends, let us work together to promote respect for diversity, pluralism, justice, equality, regardless of religion, gender, race or ethnicity.

I applaud your presence here for this special occasion. As members of the human family, we stand on common ground. From that common ground, let us work together for a world at peace.

Thank you.