

## High-Level Thematic Debate of the United Nations General Assembly

### Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism

21-22 April 2015

The President of the General Assembly in conjunction with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations will convene a High-Level General Assembly Thematic Debate on *"Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism"*, to be held on 21-22 April 2015.

#### **Background**

The world is experiencing profound and complex challenges, including the rise of radicalization and violent extremism, against a backdrop of identity-based conflicts, cultural and religious tensions. Countering these challenges and the threat they pose to populations around the world call for the use of a wide range of approaches to promote tolerance and reconciliation, respect for cultural diversity and freedom of belief, thought and expression. Among these approaches, dialogue – including among religious leaders – is a critical tool for fostering peaceful, inclusive societies that reinforce shared human values and a sense of common humanity.

The United Nations General Assembly is ideally placed to serve as a platform for advancing international cooperation and intercultural dialogue to promote understanding, tolerance and respect for diversity. This high-level thematic debate can serve as a platform for Member States, faith leaders and other stakeholder to promote peaceful coexistence and reconciliation, and to counter the destructive narratives of extremists who thrive on simplistic explanations, mistrust, and fragmentation.

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, as the lead entity of the UN Secretariat assisting countries to address global challenges with interfaith and intercultural dimensions, actively supports Member States in addressing rising tensions that appear through radicalization, violence and extremism with the tools of dialogue, mutual understanding and reconciliation.

Global efforts to promote tolerance, reconciliation and the values of diversity benefit immensely from collective and inclusive approaches built on trust, dialogue and collaboration and complemented by relevant national and regional efforts. Member States have, through the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, set out a comprehensive framework which aims, *inter alia*, to enhance national, regional and international efforts to counter terrorism through the means of conflict prevention and resolution, negotiation, mediation, conciliation, judicial settlement, rule of law, peacekeeping and peacebuilding. Pillar I of this strategy focuses on addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism. Effectively addressing root causes by strengthening international dialogue and reconciliation can contribute to fostering peaceful and inclusive societies.

Addressing the drivers of violent extremism calls for a renewed focus on good governance, rule of law, respect for human rights, sustainable development, accountable institutions, the equitable delivery of services, the role of youth, women and marginalized and disenfranchised communities, education and inclusivity in the political process as well as economic and social marginalization. As Member States and stakeholders formulate a transformative post-2015 development agenda, promoting tolerance and reconciliation will be critical in efforts towards achieving peaceful and inclusive societies.

This high-level thematic debate is an occasion to strengthen the collective resolve of Member States and other stakeholders to counter the forces that fuel radicalization and violent extremism. The first day will provide Member States with the opportunity to discuss practical strategies to foster peaceful, inclusive societies and to counter the threat of radicalization and violent extremism.

The second day will be centered on interfaith dialogue, featuring high-level statements and interactive panel discussions with faith leaders on community engagement aimed at countering violent extremism. It will also focus on the role of faith leaders in promoting tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights.

Of the world's seven billion people, more than five billion identify themselves as members of religious communities. Having faith leaders from around the world represented at the United Nations will be a powerful demonstration of how diverse religious communities can address common challenges.

### **Objective**

The main objective of the high-level thematic debate is to provide an opportunity for Member States and faith leaders, along with other stakeholders to share experiences and to address key issues and challenges relating to the promotion of tolerance and reconciliation with the aim of fostering peaceful and inclusive societies and countering violent extremism. These include:

- I. What practical strategies can be devised to counter the threat of radicalization through people-centered and inclusive measures and avoid exclusionary approaches at local, national, regional and international levels?
- II. What measures can be pursued to promote the importance of religious, cultural, gender and social diversity in positively fostering peaceful and inclusive societies?
- III. What roles can specific actors and sectors of societies, such as women and youth, education and the media, play in promoting inclusive approaches to tolerance and reconciliation and countering violent extremism?
- IV. How can the Member States, United Nations and other stakeholders effectively support means to promote tolerance and reconciliation, including through actions aimed at conflict prevention and early detection of human rights violations?
- V. What measures can be taken to stop extremists from recruiting individuals or groups to carry out terrorist acts?
- VI. How can religious and community leaders engage at the local level to reach people who might be vulnerable to radicalization?

- VII. How can specific actors, including faith leaders, take the lead in unmasking and rejecting the misuse of religion as a justification for violent extremism?
- VIII. How can religious leaders promote tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights?
- IX. How can religious leaders promote the sustainable development goals in local communities in order to address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism?

#### **Format, Outcome and Participants**

This high-level thematic debate will take place over the course of two days; the first day will consist of an opening session, a high-level plenary and an interactive panel discussion focusing on practical strategies for fostering peaceful, inclusive societies and countering violent extremism.

The second day will include high-level interventions from faith leaders followed by two interactive panel discussions, focusing on:

- a) reaching people at the community level; and
- b) highlighting a counter-narrative that emphasizes tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights.

The outcome will be a President's summary, which will be circulated to all Member States and stakeholders.

Member States will be invited to participate at the highest possible level, and are invited to include religious leaders in their delegations. Observers, UN entities, civil society, media, and other stakeholders will also participate.

**High-Level Thematic Debate of the UN General Assembly  
Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation:  
Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism  
UNHQ– April 21-22, 2015**

*Programme*

**April 21, 2015**

**9:00 am – 9:30 pm** (General Assembly Hall)

- **Opening Session:** Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism
  - **H.E. Sam K. Kutesa**, President of the General Assembly
  - **H.E. Ban Ki-moon**, Secretary-General
  - **H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser**, High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations

**9:30 am – 1:00 pm** (General Assembly Hall)

- **High-level Plenary Session:** High-level representatives, Permanent Missions, Observers

**3:00 pm – 4:30 pm** (Trusteeship Council Chamber)

- **Interactive panel discussion:** Practical Strategies for fostering peaceful, inclusive societies and countering violent extremism
- **Chair:** **H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser**, High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations
  - **Moderator:** **Ms. Pamela Falk**, UN Resident Correspondent, CBS News
  - **Mr Dendev Badarch**, Director of Division of Social Transformations and Intercultural Dialogue, UNESCO
  - **H.E. Francisco Caetano José Madeira**, AU Special Representative for Counter-Terrorism Cooperation
  - **Ms. Naureen Chowdhury Fink**, Head of Research, Global Center on Cooperative Security, NY
  - **Ms. Mossarat Qadeem**, PAIMAN Trust, Pakistan
  - **Mr. Maqsoud Kruse**, Executive Director, Hedayah
  - **Dr. Patrick Ho**, Deputy Chairman and Secretary-General, China Energy Fund Committee

**4:30 pm – 6:00 pm** (Trusteeship Council Chamber)

- **Plenary Session** (continued)

**April 22, 2015**

**9:00 am – 9:10 pm** (General Assembly Hall)

- **Opening Session:** The Potential for Religion in Building Bridges of Tolerance and Reconciliation
  - **H.E. Ban Ki-moon**, Secretary-General

**9:10 am – 1:00 pm** (General Assembly Hall)

- **Plenary:** Priority given to religious leaders

**3:00 pm – 4:30 pm** (Trusteeship Council Chamber)

- **Interactive panel discussion:** Highlighting a counter-narrative that emphasizes tolerance for diversity, freedom of expression and human rights
- Introductory remarks: **H.E. Ban Ki-moon**, Secretary-General
- Moderated by **Ms. Laura Trevelyan**, BBC
- Closing remarks: **H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser**, High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations

**4:30 pm – 5:50 pm** (Trusteeship Council Chamber)

- **Plenary Session** (continued)

**5:50 pm – 6:00 pm** (Trusteeship Council Chamber)

- **Closing Session**
  - **H.E. Sam K. Kutesa**, President of the General Assembly



THE PRESIDENT  
OF THE  
GENERAL ASSEMBLY

17 June 2015

Excellency,

I have the honour to transmit herewith a Summary of the key messages, recommendations and initiatives from the High-Level Thematic Debate on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation, which I convened in conjunction with the Secretary-General and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations on 21 and 22 April 2015.

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

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam K. Kutesa', with a large loop and a checkmark-like flourish at the end.

Sam K. Kutesa

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

## **High-Level General Assembly Thematic Debate**

### **Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation:**

#### **Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism**

**21-22 April 2015**

**United Nations Headquarter, New York**

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### **President's Summary**

The President of the General Assembly in conjunction with the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the UN Alliance of Civilizations convened a high-level thematic debate on “*Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism*” on 21-22 April 2015.

The main objective of this high-level thematic debate was to provide an opportunity for Member States and faith leaders, along with others stakeholders to share experiences and to address key issues and challenges relating to the promotion on tolerance and reconciliation with aim of fostering peaceful and inclusive societies and countering violent extremism.

The following summary contains key messages and recommendations arisen from the thematic debate.

### **Plenary Sessions**

Throughout the two days of debate, many speakers highlighted that the rise of radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism are threatening international peace and security and constitutes an obstacle to human development. The international response to this global threat must seek to address the deeper causes in order to resolve the problem and calibrated in such a way as not to exacerbate the challenge. Numerous speakers unambiguously emphasized that there can be no justification for terrorist attacks and acts of violence against innocent people – men, women and children – just like there can be no rational justification for attacks against places of worship, museums and historical sites as well as indiscriminate damage of irreplaceable artefacts of humanity's shared cultural heritage by terrorist groups.

Speakers pointed out that the international community must stand together and condemn, without reservation, all manifestations of intolerance, including anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism and all other forms of prejudice, incitement, harassment or violence against persons or communities based, inter alia, on race, ethnic origin or religious beliefs. Some speakers noted that acts of violent extremism, acts of terrorism, and human atrocities are being committed in the name of religion against innocent civilians. They also stressed that using violence in the name of religion is unacceptable and must be condemned regardless of whoever commits such a crime, whenever, wherever and for whatever reason.

Speakers underscored that in order to effectively address violent extremism the international community must work together across sectors, borders and faiths to address the serious challenges posed by intolerance and violent extremism through an integrated and balanced approach. Governments, religious leaders, civil society and community leaders must speak with one voice. It was underlined that addressing these challenges requires strong and coordinated global action. Therefore, a global preventive action should be put in place to prevent extremist groups from attracting and recruiting more young people.

Speakers underlined that increasing dialogue among the United Nations, religious leaders, civil society organizations and other relevant stakeholders will be essential to countering violent extremism and radicalization. They observed that tolerance, reconciliation, mutual understanding and respect as well as mutual acceptance, respect for cultural diversity, and interfaith collaboration can play a crucial role in helping people of different backgrounds build trusting relationships based on shared values and beliefs.

Regarding the causes behind radicalization and violent extremism, it was noted that there is no single root cause for violent extremism, intolerance and radicalization. It was noted that injustice and inequality, lack of rule of law, human rights violations, political exclusion and marginalization, as well as ethnic, national and religious discrimination can fuel divisions that contribute to intolerance and subsequently may propel violent extremism and radicalization. Some speakers further observed that it is important to examine challenges and actions and how they may contribute to creating breeding grounds for radicalization. Any economic interests that may be at play must be handled responsibly with paramount attention to human rights.

Participants further noted that sustained economic growth, social development, education, employment and decent jobs can play a role in addressing those critical challenges. Therefore, an important way to achieve human advancement and sustainable development is to secure a peaceful environment, social inclusion, stability and protection of human rights.

Many speakers identified youth, family, media, migration, and education as key areas of intervention for global efforts to promote tolerance and reconciliation and address violent extremism. Several speakers stressed that justice and social inclusion are essential to promote tolerance and reconciliation and that no one should be left on the margins, including religious minorities, youth, and persons with disabilities, indigenous people, women and others suffering from discrimination. They further stressed that transitional justice is critical to ensure a stable future.

It was observed that any effort to counter terror and protect innocents should comply with United Nations values and strictly respect human rights.

#### **Panel Discussion: Practical Strategies for Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism**

During the panel discussion, which was focused on practical strategies to foster peaceful, inclusive societies and countering the threat of radicalization and violent extremism, the need



to employ human centered approaches was stressed. Participants pointed out that peaceful and inclusive societies can be built through focusing on education, youth challenges, constructive use of media, and realistic consideration of migration and globalization issues.

Referring to the definition of countering violent extremism (CVE) as “non-coercive measures to prevent mobilization to terrorism”, it was noted that violent extremism cannot result only in terrorist acts but also impede development, foster tensions and sectarian violence and threaten a fragile peace or stability in many environments, including post-conflict ones.

Describing the contemporary radical and extremist terrorist groups, speakers compared these groups to social movements with a potent weapon: a compelling idea, a mobilizing narrative that purports to address and explain a wide range of grievances that may be local or regional in focus but benefit from an apparent link to a global narrative. It was stressed that terrorist groups exploit longstanding grievances in conflict-situations as well as economic, political and social marginalization, infractions of human rights and civil liberties. These are then used to fuel and ignite the minds and hearts of members of a community and posit their heinous actions as a response. Speakers indicated that, to those communities that are distant, these grievances are brought close through the internet and social media.

Participants underlined the significance of undermining and delegitimizing extremist narratives by addressing the “pull factors”, conditions that mobilize individuals and groups. It was noted that the UN has a comparative advantage since the organization represents a global community and is present on the ground. It was further stressed that these efforts would achieve greater success with closer collaboration with regional and sub-regional organizations. Promotion and protection of human rights, freedom of expression and the access to information were mentioned among the most powerful counter-narratives to that of the extremists.

It was noted that fostering a culture of mutual tolerance and social inclusiveness through the promotion of inter-faith, inter-cultural and inter-community dialogue and interaction and thus building community resilience against the drivers of terrorism is needed. Engagement, understanding, empathy, respect, trust, reconciliation were cited as steps to achieve continuous dialogue.

Participants observed that community engagement in conflict zones and conflict affected communities is central. It was noted that women – and in particular mothers – of young people who are radicalized, vulnerable to or sympathizers of the extremists, must be empowered within their communities both financially and intellectually. It was further noted that in the process of de-radicalization, rehabilitation and reintegration into society of the young people who are the target of the extremists, transforming the hearts and minds through critical thinking and producing not only a counter-narrative but a better and more attractive narrative with the help of truth and interpretation of religious texts in the correct context is crucial. The importance of involving the communities, including religious leaders, in decision making processes and encouraging them to take the ownership in countering radicalization and violent extremism was also highlighted.

It was stressed that education remained key to any long-term process for building peace, tolerance, justice and intercultural understanding.

The importance of protecting and safeguarding cultural heritage in the face of violent acts of extremists against cultural sites and museums was underlined. It was noted that a more collaborative, targeted and longer-term response is needed to stop the acts of “cultural cleansing”.

Bearing in mind the ultimate goal - inclusive, peaceful societies under the rule of law - speakers concurred that success in countering violent extremism requires substantially investing in prevention. Despite a great deal of focus on capacity development efforts and attempts to build CVE-partnerships to be composed of representatives of the government, community leaders, religious leaders, private sector, media institutions and civil society, participants identified the real challenge as the absence of a viable mechanism that can effectively promote and ensure sustainable implementation of the measures best suited under the specific circumstances.

### **Plenary and Panel Discussion with Faith Leaders**

Centred on interfaith dialogue, the second day featured many powerful and inspirational messages from religious leaders from across a wide range of faith traditions. These interventions, delivered both in plenary and in a panel discussion that focused on highlighting a counter-narrative, can help inform a collective response to the threat of intolerance and extremism. Many speakers stressed that continued open dialogue will be needed in the face of an evolving threat. It was underlined that to achieve reconciliation a series of steps were essential: engagement and dialogue leading to better understanding, empathy, respect and trust, ultimately opening the way to reconciliation.

Speakers unanimously rejected violence saying that “religion does not cause violence” and that “true faith stands for life”. In respecting differences the principle that violence and hatred have no place in a civilized world must be upheld. Stressing that the relevant question to ask is “How do we ensure that religion plays its positive role in our world of today?”, it was emphasized by most speakers that religion can nurture good human beings capable of exercising compassion, mercy, forgiveness, truthfulness, selflessness, humility, and love. Furthermore, it was underscored that religion seeks to give meaning and purpose to all the different components of human identity, from the most basic such as family, through the larger components of communities, ethnic groups, nations and peoples, to the widest components of humanity and creation as a whole. However, when identities come under threat, religion may acquire a far greater prominence in times and places of conflict, nurturing and strengthening the threatened identity.

Many speakers stressed that faith leaders around the world work on the front lines of their communities where they should use their spiritual and moral influence to counter the destructive narratives by being role models and standing up for moderation and mutual understanding. Furthermore, in order to promote tolerance, reconciliation and harmony,

greater visibility to enlightened inclusive voices would be necessary, including through the media.

Emphasizing that "a crime perpetrated in the name of religion is the greatest crime against religion", it was also underlined that extremists – by misusing and abusing God's name to legitimize barbarism – exploit religion, falsify its image and use it to achieve non-religious objectives. It was highlighted that religious practitioners and scholars should assist in correcting misinterpretations and misquotations that may encourage radicalization and violent extremism.

Most interventions sought to explore how best to address the sources of violent extremism and radicalization. Poverty, social or political marginalization that lead people to feel that they are unwanted and unwelcome in the wider society were identified as such possible sources. Likewise, it was stressed that – in the world of today – inclusiveness has become a condition for a peaceful society and that concern for the common good cannot stop only with the citizens of a nation, but must cover also visitors and migrants. Theology itself, it was noted, must be inclusive and allow and promote respect for religious diversity. Another important pillar of building inclusive societies was identified as education. The role of community leaders and religious leaders was emphasized in making sure that educational systems are equipped with teaching all good essence of religious teachings. It was further stated that lack of education and extreme poverty in society are interconnected and that other particular socio-economic factors playing a role could be inequality, the lack of opportunity for upward mobility and failure to provide basic services. A further aspect was highlighted by stressing that violent religious extremism above all is an attitude of mind, fed by faith and religious fervor and that to counter and defuse it, one must reach into the mind, heart and soul of the militants and terrorists.

Stating that "tolerance is a necessary, but not sufficient, element of lasting peace", it was pointed out that mutual respect, acceptance and understanding are key elements and that promoting dialogue could serve as an antidote to sectarian tensions.

### **Recommendations and Initiatives**

A number of participants referred to concrete ideas and suggestions from experiences and lessons learned in different contexts addressing various aspects of the subject matter:

- Iraq and Germany announced an initiative for a General Assembly resolution on saving the cultural heritage of Iraq.
- The Secretary-General recalled that he will forward a comprehensive United Nations Action Plan on preventing violent extremism to the General Assembly later this year, which will emphasize, among other things, the core values of peace, justice and human dignity as true alternatives to extremists' hatred and fear. It will also focus on prevention through equitable institutions, inclusive governance, and respect for human rights and the rule of law.

- The Secretary-General has committed to forming an advisory panel of faith leaders and others to guide the United Nations in addressing the complex issues arising from this broad agenda and for promoting tolerance and reconciliation.
- Encourage more intellectual exchanges and promote wider thematic dialogues on the roots and ramifications of terrorism and radicalisation.
- UN could engage more specifically through such means as strategic communications in countering terrorism or violent extremism, or in the form of more deliberate efforts to undermine and delegitimize extremist narratives.
- The UN's role as a neutral arbitrator in mediation efforts should be supported by confidence building measures to build trust and mutual respect.
- Leverage mechanisms and special procedures of the Human Rights Council, which provide a unique source of knowledge and practical tools, in order to nurture more tolerant and inclusive societies.
- The Action Plan for the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022), adopted by UNESCO's Member States and endorsed by the UN General Assembly, acts as a mobilizing framework for engaging existing and new partners and stakeholders in a dynamic manner, to create an enabling environment for fostering peaceful and inclusive societies.
- Cross-cultural internship programs to foster dialogue should be encouraged.
- Need to empower authentic and locally driven solutions in order to enhance an inclusive approach that builds on deep understanding of local and regional dynamics.
- Member States that have developed national strategies in the field of countering violent extremism could share these with other states a step forward in the practical arena of collaboration.
- The important role of religious institutions in working to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and – going forward – the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), once adopted, in areas like education, health, rural development and reduction of extreme poverty, was noted and it was stressed that successful outcomes can also be achieved if religious communities are mobilized and empowered to undertake projects of peacebuilding, conflict resolution and dialogue.
- Bring religious voices into the mainstream of international discussions and relevant negotiations processes.
- Need for more sustained meaningful engagement between governments, civil society, religious leaders and the communities they represent and that these relevant stakeholders should be permanently connected and integrated into the work of the UN system on the basis of equitable and effective partnerships.
- A strong message from many participants underscored the need to protect holy sites with many saying that any attack on such sites are, in fact, an attack on all faiths.

21 April 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,  
President of the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Opening of the High-level Thematic Debate on Promoting  
Tolerance and Reconciliation**

**Excellencies,  
Honourable Ministers,  
Mr. Secretary-General,  
Mr. High Representative for the United Nations Alliance  
of Civilizations,  
Religious Leaders  
Distinguished panellists,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am pleased to welcome you to this High-level Thematic Debate on Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation: Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism. I thank the Secretary-General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon and the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser for their partnership and commitment in organizing this event. I welcome the numerous dignitaries here this morning that have travelled from their capitals to participate in today's event. Your presence here attests to the importance and keen interest attached to this debate.

**Excellencies,**

The year 2015 is indeed a year of hope and opportunity as we formulate an ambitious and transformative post-2015 development agenda, which will seek to create a more prosperous, equitable and sustainable future for people around the world.

As we work together to identify ways to put our world on a path toward sustainable development, we would be remiss to neglect the multifaceted challenges threatening international peace and security and creating formidable obstacles to human development.

Around the world, people, communities and nations are grappling with a disquieting rise of radicalization and violent extremism, fuelled by identity-based conflicts and cultural and religious tensions.

With troubling frequency, violent attacks are being carried out against innocent civilians in places of worship, museums, supermarkets, schools and historical sites. These abhorrent crimes claim the lives of men, women and children indiscriminately, leaving devastated families and communities in their wake.

From Paris to Tunis; from Garissa to Yarmouk; from Johannesburg to Peshawar; no person, society or nation is immune from intolerance and the threat of terrorism or violent extremism.

In places like Iraq, Afghanistan and Mali, irreplaceable artefacts of humanity's shared cultural heritage are being destroyed.

The brutal terrorist attacks by ISIS, Al-Qaeda, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram; and other groups have put in sharp focus the rising threat of terrorism and extremism. There is no justification for such attacks. We must condemn, without reservation, all manifestations of intolerance; including, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, racism and all other forms of prejudice, incitement, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on race, ethnic origin or religious belief.

**Ladies and gentlemen,**

Given today's globalized and highly interconnected world, it is incumbent that the international community collectively address the serious challenges posed by intolerance and violent extremism through an integrated and balanced approach.

Divisions within our communities and among nations can create deep fault lines that foster discontent and frustration. Societies that fail to be inclusive can often serve as breeding grounds for radicalisation.

Sustained economic and social development could reduce marginalization, which in some cases propels extremism and the recruitment of terrorists. Addressing the challenges of poverty, as well as the lack of educational and employment opportunities can form the basis of a holistic approach to creating peaceful societies.

Injustice and inequality, lack of rule of law, human rights violations, political exclusion, as well as ethnic, national and religious discrimination can also fuel divisions that contribute to intolerance.

Distinguished participants,

Throughout the history of humanity, we have seen that faith and interfaith collaboration can play a crucial role in helping people of different backgrounds build trusting relationships based on shared values and beliefs. I therefore welcome the participation of religious leaders in today's event and that of tomorrow.

In the face of the recent, troubling events worldwide, many faith-based organizations and religious leaders have emphasized the need for peaceful coexistence, dialogue, tolerance and forgiveness. Their messages of harmony and peace are of great importance and value given the unique and prominent roles of religious leaders.

Concerted efforts should be made to support religious leaders and help spread their messages of peace and hope as we seek to advance mutual respect, tolerance and dialogue as a response to the darkness of intolerance, hatred, hostility, bigotry and discrimination.

### **Excellencies,**

Together, we must strive to create cohesion within our communities and among our nations to address the contributing factors. We must promote dialogue and mutual understanding, while enhancing respect for religious and cultural diversity and strengthening the principles of freedom of thought, belief and expression.

During this debate, we will also explore the powerful role that women, youth and the media can play on relations between peoples and communities. We should take steps to harness the positive power of all of them to communicate actions and words but also take actions that promote understanding and compassion.

Education is an important weapon against prejudice and discrimination. As a global community, we should seek to educate a future generation that is accepting of others and embraces diversity. In classrooms around the world, we should emphasize values that are rooted in the principles of dignity and respect.

Families also have an invaluable role to play, in this regard. Within our families, we not only have the opportunity, but indeed, the obligation to teach our children how to treat each other with kindness and respect.

### **Excellencies,**

Over the next two days we will share ideas and strategies for addressing the rise of intolerance and extremism that we are currently witnessing around the world.

At the very heart of our discussions will be a call for change. Indeed, we must change actions. And we must change attitudes.

To do so, we must all do our part. Leaders around the world, across our communities, inside our schools and within our households have a role to play in this endeavour.

Together we can, and in fact we must, find a way to create a more tolerant, peaceful world.

I thank you for your participation in this event and look forward to your contributions.



**REMARKS OF H.E. MR. NASSIR ABDULAZIZ AL-NASSER  
UNITED NATIONS HIGH REPRESENTATIVE  
UNITED NATIONS ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS**

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**AT THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH LEVEL MEETING  
“PROMOTING TOLERANCE AND RECONCILIATION:  
FOSTERING PEACEFUL, INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES  
AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

**New York, 21 April 2015**

**Your Excellency Mr. Sam Kutesa, President of the General Assembly,  
Your Excellency Mr. Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations  
Excellencies,  
Distinguished faith leaders,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**It is a distinct honor for me to be here with you today.**

**I want to begin by thanking you for traveling all this distance so we can  
join hands for the exciting two working days ahead of us.**

**Mr. Secretary-General; thank you for believing in the United Nations  
Alliance of Civilizations and supporting the convening of this very special  
meeting.**

**I was very glad with your announcement of this High Level Meeting when  
you addressed the Summit on Countering Violent Extremism at the White House  
this past January.**

**I would also like to thank the President of the General Assembly who  
showed interest in galvanizing this proposal and for putting his team behind it  
and working closely with my team.**



**Our meeting brings, political and religious leaders, from across the globe. They are here to speak with one voice and say: NO to what divides us and YES to what unites us.**

**Tolerance and Reconciliation are such two noble human values. They are values inherent in all major faiths. Sadly, for the past few years, we have been witnessing un-imaginable acts of violence, terrorism and human atrocities committed in the name of religion**

**Such heinous acts brought many regions of our world to a boiling point, fueling the burning furnace of xenophobia, radicalization and discrimination.**

**A persistent question echoed across the globe: what can be done to stop the scourge of this vortex?**

**Today, the United Nations is writing history. This meeting is a step in the right direction.**

**For the first time ever, the Secretary General, the President of the General Assembly and the High Representative of a UN specialized Agency are co-organizing and convening together a High Level UN meeting, to address unique, new and emerging threats to International Peace and Security.**

**The reason we are here, above all else, is to hear from you, political and religious leaders, on how we can counter the increasing, intolerance, violent extremism, terrorism and relapsing of whole societies in the black hole of cultural and ethnic tensions.**

**Second, to demonstrate the true meaning of understanding and respecting others' faiths and beliefs.**

**And finally, how key values such as tolerance, reconciliation and mutual understanding can be translated into meaningful and mutually beneficial actions that eventually, all of you will carry to your communities.**

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**Here at the United Nations, we achieved, among other outcomes, an important universal document; the United Nations Global Counter Terrorism strategy. The Alliance is focusing, in particular, on its first Pillar that we call it: Pillar (1), which focuses on the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism.**

**We know from our experience — from both the successes and the failures — that regardless of how much we improve our security, terrorism will not go away until we address the conditions conducive to its emergence and growth.**

**At the same time, world leaders will adopt, this September, the new 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The mission of the Alliance is indeed similar to Sustainable Development Goal 16, on the need for securing peaceful and inclusive societies.**

**Therefore, it is not a coincidence that we specifically chose such a diverse gathering of individuals to come together for this event, in order to persuade you and your communities that the only way to achieve, the human advancement and sustainable development we want, is to secure an environment that enjoys peace, stability and protects human rights.**

**But to do so effectively, we need to work together with you across sectors and across faiths.**

**Governments and Member States alongside religious leaders alongside civil society and community leaders.**

**Muslims alongside Christians and Jews, alongside Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs and all other faiths, all working hand in hand as responsible leaders to encourage our people to do the same.**

**This is not a meeting that ends with lengthy documents. It is a meeting that ends by your future actions, when you leave back home and persuade your communities with the inevitability of co-existence and the future we all want.**

**You will be our agents and messengers of peace, so please do so.**

**Irrespective of how atrocious and wickedly cruel I find the actions of radical groups, condemning them here in this meeting will not end the source of the problem unless we create the necessary counter narratives to respond, effectively, to their evil.**

**Without our global preventive actions, they will still be able to recruit more young people and grow further.**

**Without our collective efforts, global issues like migration, media and education, will be misused and possessed with the same evil that threatens our existence.**

**There are much to do with the social media, to combat the viral messages of insult, hate, incitement to hatred and recruitment of new terrorists.**

**Our leaders need to show more responsibility in order to effectively respond to these new kinds of threats. Good governance is not luxury any more; it has become a necessary requirement to ensure our global safety and security in our planet that became a Global Village.**

**There are much we need to do with our social environments of marginalization, economic austerity and lack of equal opportunities in which we find our selves ashamed of social injustices that doesn't fit the 21<sup>st</sup> century.**

**Much of what the UN does, and indeed much of what we are trying to address through the new Sustainable Development Goals, that will guide all of us through 2030, attempt to address these imbalances.**

**But, again, let me be clear: we cannot make progress on any of these targets without your partnerships, as Member States, faith leaders, intellectuals, civil society, and others. Everyone has a role to play.**

**Moreover, to deliver on its mandate, the UN especially needs the support of the women and men who lead our faith communities.**

**They exist among the seven billion people in this world and identify themselves as peers of their religious communities.**

**We need their help to advance and give meaning to the global conversation and protection of human rights.**

**All of the world's major religions bear shared commitments to building peace and emphasizing the oneness of humanity, to standing on the side of the marginalized, and to working to resolve conflicts.**

**Therefore, religious mediation compliments and supports preventive diplomacy. This is the true purpose of religion.**

**Tomorrow, this organization would want to listen to voices, opinions, guidance and recommendations of those peers of faiths and religions.**

**We equally need the responsible leadership of our heads of state and government more than ever before, to make progress on development and find durable solutions to our various crises.**

**From water access to universal education to prolonged International and Regional Conflicts and fighting communicable diseases.**

**These are huge responsibilities, therefore no nation can succeed alone in these tasks; success in these areas requires sincere global action.**

**But, as I say all this, I also feel compelled to state that there are areas in which we need to significantly change our approach; one that is often on my mind is the space and opportunities we give to young people.**

**In many parts of the world, around 70% of our population is under the age of 30. Yet, if you were to look at the role young people have in decision making, you would notice their notable absence.**

**Indeed, many young people who are politically active and frustrated with the few avenues available to them to create meaningful change, struggle with a persistent feeling of dis-empowerment. This is understandable.**

**More troublingly, this feeling is precisely what allows extremist organizations to prey on them.**

**We must take this chance away from the extremists, if we are serious about our goals.**

**With the challenges that are now in front of us, it is my firm conviction that the greatest gift we can give to our next generation is to leave them with a different set of stories, different perceptions and narratives.**

**The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is part of that change with its focus, not only on Youth, but also on media, migration and education as crucial components of its work.**

**In this regard, I would like to highlight 4 specific observations.**

**First, we must build trust. Trust at state level and at community level.**

**Words like “dialogue”, “reconciliation”, and “empowerment” mean little if not supported by concrete actions that address the, often valid, grievances young people have.**

**Second, we need human-centered approaches that show sensitivity and seriousness to taking a shared journey with our partners on the ground.**

**If we don't take into account our shared and differentiated responsibilities, we would be distant from the real world we are living in.**

**And, if we look at our cultural diversity as a problem, we better change this mis-conception because planet earth is our universal address and we will always have to learn how to share it, all together.**

**Third, we need to honestly and consciously work toward overcoming our own short-comings.**

**What I mean when I say this is that; in doing the work of countering violent extremism, we need to take into account that our preventive action should not be limited to only reforming the UN as a body.**

**Our actions should also entail reforming the way we responsibly execute our actions in accordance with International Law.**

**Preventive action should include the empowerment and reform of the relevant existing instruments needed by the International Community, to respond to, and cope with, the new and emerging ideological threats, for the sake of our collective security and Human Rights for all.**

**Finally, our focus must always be on measurable behavioral shifts. For instance, if we are trying to eradicate the flow of foreign terrorist fighters, we can choose to condemn the practice, issue statements or fatwas against this dynamic.**

**But we must at the same time ask ourselves if our actions are working and leading to concrete results. If not, then we must boldly go back to the drawing board and try new approaches, based again on listening to those whom we are trying to influence.**

**\*\*\***

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

**Manifestations of religious based intolerance and violence are increasing across the globe. Such unjustifiable acts have culminated into targeted killings against innocent people from different faiths, spreading stereotyping, xenophobia and racism.**

**Such unjustified prejudices would only play into the hands of terrorists and threaten our global stability, international peace and security as well as human rights and development. Moreover, these acts violate the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and International Law.**

**The scourge we are all facing as a Global human family runs contrary to the values of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, which embraces as its**

core mission the promotion of cultural diversity, religious tolerance, and inclusiveness.

UNAOC has consistently amplified these values that are best promoted through, peaceful and meaningful dialogue in accordance with universally accepted norms and shared values.

Peace, stability, intercultural harmony and Sustainable Development are closely inter-linked and mutually re-inforcing; they are key factors to accomplishing an environment conducive to prosperity and Human Rights.

Therefore, we need to protect our future and our generations from the forces that fuel tensions, hatred and violence.

The United Nations, since its inception was given the sacred task of addressing threats to international peace and security.

The existing United Nations resolutions, including the resolutions of the General Assembly, Security Council and Human Rights Council, as well as other UN and regional instruments, provide the international community with legal and moral tools to prevent and combat the roots of hatred and intolerance.

These viable norms must always be at the core of our global discussions.

Sadly and despite the efforts made, certain ideological mindsets continue to project their uncivilized face in our world. Yet, these vicious forces should not hamper our efforts nor deter our political will to prevent and combat the new and emerging threats in all their forms.

These collective efforts should become priority to the international community for the sake of our Global Human Sustainable Development.

In closing, I hope that I have said enough to help frame our conversation over the next two days. For my part, I count on engaging with each one of you on the floor and on margins of this meeting

My conviction remains strong that, with sincere intentions and persistent focus, we can succeed in overcoming our major differences.

I thank you.

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22 April 2015

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Sam Kahamba Kutesa,  
President of the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of the General Assembly,  
at the Closing of the High-level Thematic Debate on Promoting  
Tolerance and Reconciliation**

Excellencies,

Your Excellency, Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I thank our panellists, speakers and all of you for your participation and valuable contributions throughout this High-level Thematic Debate on “Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation”. I am particularly grateful to the religious leaders who have provided a great deal of insights, perspectives and proposals.

Over the last two days, we have exchanged a wide range of ideas and strategies for countering the troubling rise of intolerance and violent extremism we are witnessing around the world.

Indeed, this debate has allowed us to literally and figuratively stand up and tell our neighbour – “I can not live without you.”

Throughout the event, we have heard resounding calls for an inclusive, inter-religious, inter-cultural dialogue with a view toward building mutual trust and understanding.

There was widespread agreement that no one should be left on the margins; including young people, women, religious minorities or others facing discrimination based on race, ethnic origin or religious belief.

Speakers underscored the urgent need to effectively address the drivers and underlying causes that contribute to intolerance, including injustice, inequality, lack of rule of law, human rights violations, marginalization, exclusion, as well as ethnic, national and religious discrimination.

The need to further promote justice, equality, good governance, equitable institutions and economic and social development was underscored. It was stressed that national and local contexts should be taken into account and that both short-term and long-term interventions are required to address the challenges posed by radicalization and extremism.

Many participants underlined the critical importance of addressing these challenges as the international community moves towards a universal post-2015 development agenda. It was widely noted that in today’s globalized world, the international community should work collectively to counter the spread of radicalization and extremism.

Some participants called for a global preventive action plan to address the recruitment or luring of young people into terrorist organizations. It was noted that youth are vital in creating a more tolerant future generation, with educators and parents, especially mothers, having a particularly important role to play in their upbringing.

Many speakers also recognized the importance of media; both as a recruitment tool for terrorist organizations, as well as a positive means for engaging and educating citizens in a thoughtful, productive fashion. Media was also stressed as an important communications platform for moderate voices. Some speakers emphasized that social media tools need to be creatively and effectively leveraged to counterbalance negative messaging from violent extremist groups.

**Excellencies,  
Distinguished delegates,**

Today's session on interfaith collaboration featured many powerful and inspirational messages from religious leaders from across a wide range of faiths. The ideas and solutions we have exchanged can help inform our collective response to the rising threat of intolerance and extremism, although as many speakers emphasized, continued dialogue will be needed as we seek to address these evolving threats.

We should individually and collectively redouble our efforts to promote mutual respect, tolerance, dialogue and reconciliation to counter intolerance, hatred, hostility, bigotry and discrimination. We need to go beyond tolerance towards the principles of mutual respect, understanding and acceptance, in full recognition of the individual worth and dignity of every person.

As one speaker said so succinctly – a crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion.

Religious leaders have an important role to play, and we should support them in spreading their messages of peace, harmony and hope. Steps should be taken to fully engage religious leaders, including greater collaboration with the United Nations, with a focus on maximizing their respective strengths.

Many participants highlighted the need for a better, more-convincing narrative that focuses on the benefits of pluralism as an alternative to extremist ideology. Such a narrative could have a particularly powerful impact on young people that may otherwise be drawn toward radicalization.

I look forward to the Secretary-General's proposed action plan on preventing violent extremism, as well as the establishment of an advisory panel of faith leaders and others to help guide our efforts.

I will be transmitting a President's summary of this debate to Member States and stakeholders in the weeks ahead.

Once again, thank you for your participation and valuable contribution.