



STATEMENT BY

**THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED NATIONS
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
H.E. MR. JAN ELIASSON**

AT THE

**OPENING OF THE PLENARY DEBATE ON
THE CULTURE OF PEACE AND ON THE
GLOBAL AGENDA FOR DIALOGUE AMONG
CIVILIZATIONS**

**UNITED NATIONS HEADQUARTERS
NEW YORK
20 OCTOBER 2005**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

At the World Summit in mid-September, our assembled leaders reaffirmed the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace as well as the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and its Programme of Action adopted by the General Assembly. They also committed themselves to taking action to promote a culture of peace and dialogue at the local, national, regional and international levels.

This is the background for today's debate. It is thus not only topical but equally of political relevance that you, the Member States, will be called upon to provide guidance on the follow-up to the Outcome document in this regard.

Our deliberations are based on three reports of the Secretary-General, including one prepared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), on the Midterm global review of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010.

In the words of the Declaration on a Culture of Peace adopted by the 53rd General Assembly in 1999, the Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behavior and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes and solving problems through dialogue and negotiations. The Culture of Peace is based on respect for human rights, democracy and tolerance, the promotion of development, education for peace, the free flow of information and the wider participation of women as an integral element in

preventing violence and conflicts. In fact, many of the day-to-day activities of the United Nations system aim to contribute to the Culture of Peace.

The observance of the Decade has now reached its midpoint. This is an opportunity to take stock of progress and to provide new impetus, focus and energy for the second half of the Decade. We need to ask ourselves, what have been promising and effective practices and approaches? Have we succeeded in bringing all stakeholders on board, including all UN agencies, funds and programmes? Have Governments done enough over the past five years to foster peace and non-violence at all levels? What more can be done to encourage civil society and the private sector to increase their role in support of a culture of peace, which must be rooted in the minds and hearts of people, and especially young people?

Our concrete task ahead is to ensure that we continue to find the most effective ways to operationalize efforts to strengthen a global culture of peace. Particular emphasis should not only be placed on the mechanisms of collaboration, but also on the substantive areas of engagement, not least education. In addition, we must define more effective ways to work with civil society and NGOs, the media and the private sector in order to ensure strong and coherent action throughout the Decade.

There are also new aspects which had not entered the international debate at the time the General Assembly adopted the Declaration and Plan of Action. One of these aspects pertains to cultural diversity. In the Summit Outcome document our leaders acknowledged the

diversity of the world and recognized that all cultures and civilizations contribute to the enrichment of humankind. They also acknowledged the importance of respect for religious and cultural diversity throughout the world. Interreligious dialogue is being increasingly recognized for its contribution not only to the objectives of the culture of peace, but also to the dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples.

This leads me to the other matter on the agenda for today's plenary meetings, the Global Agenda for the Dialogue among Civilizations. The report of the Secretary-General reveals an emerging consensus on an overarching framework for effective dialogue-related activities. The framework consists of universally shared values cutting across all cultures and civilizations, especially tolerance, mutual understanding and observance of human rights and democratic governance.

The major challenge for us all is to translate pledges to adhere to these values into concrete action through a variety of practical initiatives as called for in the Programme of Action for the Dialogue among Civilizations. Here I would like to welcome the initiative by the Secretary-General to launch the "Alliance of Civilizations" on 14 July 2005, at the initiative of the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey. This initiative aims to address the need for a concerted effort by the international community, at both the institutional and civil society levels, to bridge divides and overcome the prejudice, misperceptions and polarization that undermines trust and potentially threatens international security.

We live in a world of much distrust and suspicion. We must mobilize the political will to change negative trends, to prevent polarization and pessimism. Strengthening a culture of peace, fostering interreligious dialogue and continuing the dialogue among civilizations will contribute to enhancing hope and belief in the future.

The fact that we are discussing these three concepts together today in the Plenary of the General Assembly is an approach to nurture in the years to come. I hope that our discussions today will lead towards concrete and sustained actions and strengthen our efforts to reach a truly global culture of peace and a meaningful dialogue among civilizations, cultures and peoples of our world.