

22 June 2005

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Jean Ping,
President of the 59th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Conference of Interfaith Cooperation for Peace**

Mr. Chairman,
Mr. President of ECOSOC,
Mr. Secretary-General of the Conference,
Mr. Assistant-Secretary-General,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to address you this morning on the issue of interfaith cooperation for peace. I must commend and congratulate the tripartite convening group, composed of governments, United Nations system organizations and civil society, for organizing this conference. I would like also to congratulate the Philippines in particular for mobilizing the tripartite efforts in the run-up to this conference.

The United Nations and the religions of the world share a common concern for human dignity, justice and peace. The objectives and principles enshrined in the Charter of the UN, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the Millennium Declaration represent a common set of global values shared by all cultures and civilizations.

The United Nations General Assembly recognizes the importance of engaging religious communities. It adopted by consensus, at its 59th session, resolutions on the promotion of interreligious dialogue; the promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation; and the elimination of all forms of religious intolerance.

Intercultural understanding and interreligious dialogue are integral parts of the effort to translate shared values into actions and constitute important dimensions of the Dialogue among Civilizations and of the Culture of Peace. I am encouraged by the evolution of interfaith dialogue into the arena of interfaith cooperation that our conference today explores.

Interreligious dialogue promotes understanding, tolerance and friendship among people in all the diversity of their religions, beliefs, cultures and languages. Such a dialogue is particularly needed in areas burdened by inter- or intra-religious conflicts resulting from mistrust, misunderstanding or ignorance of spiritual traditions and their specific cultures and practices.

If religions have contributed to the peace of the world, we have also to recognize that they have been used to create division and fuel hostilities. Fanaticism and adherence to exclusive ideologies, both religious and secular, have challenged religious communities, governments and international relations for centuries.

It is important that in building our civilizations, we enhance interfaith cooperation among governments, civil society and the United Nations system, in the context of the agenda of the Culture of Peace and Dialogue among Civilizations to achieve sustainable peace in the twenty-first century.

The quest for peace and justice, and the need to overcome violence, binds religions, governments and the UN together. Their partnership is appropriate as stakeholders in the achievement of a regime of rights and freedoms, a culture of peace, a civilization of tolerance, a policy of inclusion and empowerment, and of sustainable economy.

The commitment of the world's religious leaders to global peace will be reinforced by today's conference. The outcome of the conference should highlight key areas in which religions can play a role in helping reduce conflict and in addressing the critical needs of humankind as we explore strategies to enhance interfaith cooperation for sustainable peace.

By strengthening intercultural and interreligious dialogue and cooperation, we will further advance on the path to enlarging freedom and sustaining peace. A true Culture of Peace can be founded upon the heritage of religious and spiritual traditions.

The conference recommendations on strategies to enhance interfaith cooperation towards peace could enrich the outcome of the High Level Plenary Meeting in September and serve as an important material on the subject of promotion of Interreligious dialogue.

I thank you.