

19 October 2006

**Statement of H.E. Ms. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa,  
President of the 61st Session of the General Assembly,  
at the High-Level Expert Forum on Capacity Building for Peace and  
Development: Roles of Diaspora**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning to you all. I am honored to be here with you today.

I would like to thank Ms. Julia Marton-Lefèvre for inviting me to address the important contribution diaspora communities have made to peace and development around the world.

I would also like to take this opportunity to recognize the close links between the University of Peace and the United Nations. And, to thank the University for its many contributions to international debates on peace and security.

It is fitting that Toronto, a true hub of multiculturalism, is the venue for this forum.

Historically, diaspora communities have been agents of progress. And today, they continue to contribute to the richness and diversity of the countries in which they settle: making valuable contributions to intellectual, scientific, political, economic and cultural life.

Diaspora communities aspire to a peaceful and prosperous existence, having often emerged from situations of conflict and poverty. And as many of you in Toronto will be aware, diaspora communities are particularly successful entrepreneurs.

We must bear these important contributions in mind, as new communities arrive.

I believe that the older generations of diaspora have a crucial role to play in welcoming newcomers.

Beginning a new life, in a new country, can be a daunting challenge. Those who have already lived through this are best equipped to assist those experiencing this transition.

However, we all have a responsibility - governments, the private sector, civil society, academia, and the media - to help new diaspora communities achieve their hopes and aspirations.

Ladies and gentlemen.

World leaders gathered at the 2005 World Summit at the United Nations reaffirmed the three interlinked pillars of the United Nations - peace and security, development and human rights. They adopted an ambitious reform agenda to strengthen the United Nations in implementing its goals.

World leaders also accepted the principle of the Responsibility to Protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity.

By upholding our commitment to this principle we can address some of the key drivers that force communities to emigrate.

Furthermore, in September, at the beginning of its 61st Session, the General Assembly held the first High-level Dialogue on International Migration and Development. The High-level Dialogue noted that diaspora have a positive impact on economic development in both their country of origin and in their new homes. This sentiment was shared by governments, the private sector and civil society.

Diaspora communities experience the challenges and the potentials of the different societies and cultures to which they belong.

This insight is political, economic, social and personal.

We must ensure that diaspora communities are given the opportunity to engage constructively and harmoniously in society and in policy making. Quality education and equal work opportunities must be available to diaspora communities.

To create these conditions we must work together to overcome negative stereotypes and discrimination in all levels of society, especially in schools and in the work place. Academic institutions from primary school to Universities and the media, also have an important role and responsibility to dispel misperceptions and promote positive images of diversity.

We can formulate social policy by learning from societies that have long been home to and welcomed diaspora communities. And, most importantly, from the members of the diaspora themselves.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Advances in transportation and communication during the 20th century paved the way for the creation of multicultural societies, that included vibrant diaspora communities.

Multiculturalism is now valued more than ever. Multiculturalism is both the hope of globalization and its challenge.

It should represent the peaceful coexistence and celebration of diversity, and not the loss of cultural identity.

We cannot allow cultural differences to be used as the basis or pretext for conflict.

Diaspora communities are uniquely endowed with the multi cultural experiences which allow us to transcend false perceptions of "the other". They must raise their voices for peace and development.

Ladies and gentlemen.

During my tenure as President of the General Assembly, I shall organize three thematic debates of the General Assembly on development, gender issues and the dialogue of civilizations.

These debates shall provide an opportunity for Member States to come together with all other relevant stakeholders, to identify new partnerships and innovative solutions.

We need global solutions to global challenges. And, I believe that global solutions can only be found through multilateral and multi-stakeholder cooperation.

Diaspora communities are key stakeholders. Within the UN system we will continue to work to provide a platform for diaspora communities to be heard.

I would like to end by paraphrasing a quote from Henry Miller:

When we travel from one place to another, we are not simply traveling to another location; we are changing the angle from which we view the world.

In our common quest for peace and development, the ability to shape our world view to reflect the diversity of cultures and needs that exist is the key to success.

Thank you.