

27 September 2009

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki,
President of the 64th Session of the General Assembly,
UN Sunday at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine**

Very Reverend Dean Kowalski,
Esteemed Members of the Clergy,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a privilege and honor for me to be invited to speak to you today in this gloriously restored Cathedral, as we honour the mission of the United Nations. I would like to thank the Very Rev. Dr James Kowalski, the Clergy and Congregation of the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine for offering me the opportunity to take part in this special occasion, which testifies to our shared vision for strengthening universal peace.

I sense a new optimism in this Cathedral, which has been restored to its former glory after being ravaged and blackened by fire. And yet I note that the work on this Cathedral is still not completed, and that this House of God remains a building-in-progress. This is also how I like to think of the United Nations, which has a rich and varied history, but which is constantly reforming itself to adapt to the new challenges that face our planet.

The United Nations was founded on the simple premise that nations should unite to face common challenges. As President of the General Assembly, I have pledged to ensure that the United Nations can respond effectively to global crises. Climate change, pandemics, nuclear proliferation and the global financial crisis are threats that span the entire globe and cannot be solved by one country or one region alone. The H1N1 virus knows no borders. Melting icecaps threaten to submerge faraway pacific islands. Collapsing financial institutions in this city have exacerbated poverty and hunger in the developing world. These are challenges that require a global response. No other organisation enjoys such a wide membership – 192 states – and hence such a broad legitimacy to shoulder our global responsibility. I believe that the multilateralism embodied by the United Nations is the most effective way to address these global challenges.

But working together – all 192 nations – also requires patience and understanding. We respect each other's differences, but we have to overcome them if we are to act together. The founding document of the United Nations states the determination of all nations "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours, and to unite our strength to maintain international peace and security". For this reason, I have made dialogue among civilizations a cornerstone of my Presidency of the General Assembly. The Holy Book of Islam similarly teaches us "We have created

you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another.”

Dialogue is at the heart of the United Nations. It is my deeply held belief that a common humanity unites all civilizations. Civilizations are enriched and have evolved through dialogue with other civilizations. My own background is in Africa and in the Islamic World. Africa is also home to some of the oldest Christian and Jewish communities in the world. Muslim scholars from Africa studied and transmitted the classical texts of Greek antiquity, which inspired the European Renaissance. In stead of emphasizing what separates us and makes us different, we should work together based on mutual interests and mutual respect. Only in this way will we be able to face the global challenges that threaten our planet.

Let me conclude by quoting the Holy Book of Islam: “God invites man unto the abode of peace, and guides him that wills to be guided onto a straight way”.

Thank you.