

21 April 2010

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treki,
President of the 64th Session of the General Assembly,
On the occasion of the Special event to mark the International Year
for the Rapprochement of Cultures**

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations
Mr. Sha Zukang, Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs,

Your Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

We are gathered today to mark the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures, which was launched in Paris on 18 February 2010 under the auspices of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Strengthening dialogue, understanding and coexistence between all races, religions, cultures and civilizations is the key to building a multilateral international system based on mutual respect, promoting common interests, consolidating the concepts and principles of the peaceful coexistence of peoples, achieving peace and removing the seeds of conflict and crisis.

I have given the highest priority to strengthening dialogue among civilizations, cultures and religions at the sixty-fourth session of the General Assembly because I firmly believe that strengthening mutual understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures and religions, as well as respect for the symbols of those religions, is vital to ensuring regional and international stability and peace. After all, humanity is the fruit of the interaction of various cultures and civilizations throughout the ages.

This special event to mark the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures must give rise to practical and constructive measures that will increase mutual understanding between peoples. Without a profound understanding of the histories, cultures and civilizations of the peoples of the world, extremism, discrimination and conflict will only increase. This understanding must be firmly grounded in common human values, which are based on respect for differences. Labelling a specific culture or religion as being inherently violent or targeting the members of any culture or religion run counter to those values and are blatantly discriminatory actions that contravene States' obligations under international human rights law.

High-quality education is the cornerstone of our common endeavour and is essential if we are to produce future generations that wholeheartedly believe in tolerance and dialogue. Working together,

we can effectively confront the challenges and dangers facing the international community, as these do not discriminate on the basis of nationality, language, culture or religion.

As part of the General Assembly's efforts in this regard, I intend to hold a high-level thematic discussion at the General Assembly. The discussion will centre on dialogue among civilizations, asking how such dialogue can help foster international peace and security and resolve longstanding regional and international conflicts. It will complement the relevant General Assembly resolutions and the initiatives and efforts of other stakeholders, including the Alliance of Civilizations and the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations. I encourage you all to participate actively at this important event, in order to uphold the values and principles of pluralism and to assert the role of the General Assembly as the principal policymaking body of the United Nations.

Far from causing a conflagration, dialogue and a deeper understanding between religions and cultures have a positive part to play in tackling the causes of ongoing and chronic conflicts. They should help foster peace and coexistence, thereby promoting sustainable development in a socially and economically stable environment. Developing societies face an array of challenges: the eradication of poverty and hunger, international economic and financial crises, the threats posed by climate change, and several recent natural disasters. Confronting these and other challenges requires harmony between cultures, languages and religions, which are so abundant on our single earth. The international community should therefore not be encumbered with an artificial conflict. The persistence of such challenges fuels tension and frustration between communities. Development is therefore closely correlated with tolerance and the eradication of radicalism and extremism. We must engage with the task at hand in a positive and practical manner, thereby furthering the goal of world peace.