



THE PRESIDENT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

15 March 2012

Excellency,

I have the pleasure to inform you that I will convene, in partnership with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, an interactive thematic debate on “Fostering Cross-Cultural Understanding for Building Peaceful and Inclusive Societies”. This event will be held on Thursday, 22 March 2012, at Conference Room 2 (NLB).

The debate aims to support ongoing international and grassroots initiatives fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding, especially those of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, and focus on concrete approaches to promoting positive and collaborative relations among cultures.

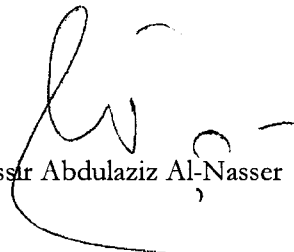
It will build on the fruitful discussions at the Fourth Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, held in Doha from 11 to 13 December 2011. Special attention will be paid to the critical role of the youth in developing innovative means to advance intercultural understanding.

The thematic debate will start with a morning session on “Cross-Cultural Understanding for Peace and Development: What Works?”, followed by an afternoon session on “Youth as Partners in Advancing Cross-cultural Understanding: Best Practices and Challenges”. High level officials from Member States, the United Nations, members of academia, representatives of non-governmental organizations and youth leaders are invited to the meeting.

The program and the concept note about this debate are attached herewith.

I would appreciate it if you could kindly join us on 22 March and contribute to this interactive discussion with your valuable views and ideas on this important topic.

Please accept, Excellency, the assurances of my highest consideration.


Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser

All Member States and
Permanent Observers
to the United Nations
New York

**INTERACTIVE THEMATIC DEBATE
ON FOSTERING CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
FOR BUILDING PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES**

(22 March 2012, Conference Room 2/NLB, United Nations Headquarters)

PROGRAM

10:00 – 10.45

Opening ceremony

- His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the United Nations General Assembly
- Her Excellency Dr. Asha-Rose Migiro, Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations
- His Excellency Mr. Beşir Atalay, Deputy Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey
- His Excellency Mr. Gonzalo de Benito, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain
- His Excellency Mr. Jorge Sampaio, High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations

10:45 – 12:45

Moderator: Mr. Riz Khan, Al Jazeera English

**First Panel Conversation: Cross-cultural Understanding for Peace and Development:
What works?**

We live in a globalized world characterized by internally fluid and diverse societies where identities and inter-relations are more complex than ever. Fears, tensions and conflicts within and among societies may be exploited in this environment, painting images of a world made up of mutually exclusive cultures, religions, or civilizations, historically distinct and destined for confrontation. In reality, the progress of humankind is the product of centuries of constructive exchanges, cross-fertilization, and peaceful coexistence. In this context, the need to build bridges between societies, to promote dialogue and understanding and to forge the collective political will to address the world's tensions and imbalances has never been greater.

Key questions:

- While there is a broad consensus across nations, cultures and religions that all societies are bound together in their humanity and interdependent in their quest for prosperity, stability and peaceful co-existence, translating this goal into concrete actions can be daunting. What are the key ingredients to successful approaches to fostering cross-cultural understanding? What are some of the most effective approaches to fostering cross-cultural understanding? How to address the issue from a youth perspective?
- Does the increased use of social media allow meaningful cross-cultural interactions?
- What is the role of educational institutions in fostering cross-cultural understanding?
- How can mediation reduce tensions and advance the search for peace in a world of diversity and competing aspirations?

Speakers:

- Prof. Homi K. Bhabha, Anne F. Rothenberg Professor of the Humanities at the Department of English, Director of the Humanities Center, Harvard University
- Dr. İbrahim Kalın, Chief Advisor to the Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey
- Prof. Vitaly Naumkin, Director, Institute of Oriental Studies
- Prof. Farhan Nizami, Director, Oxford Center for Islamic Studies
- Dr. Emad El-Din Shahin, Henry R. Luce Associate Professor of Religion, University of Notre Dame
- Her Excellency Ambassador Maria Luiza Ribeiro Viotti, Permanent Representative of Brazil to the United Nations

Question & Answer

3:00-5:00

Moderator: Mr. Riz Khan, Al Jazeera English

Second Panel Conversation: Youth as Partners in Advancing Cross-cultural Understanding: Best Practices and Challenges

Supporting young peoples' participation in efforts to advance cross-cultural understanding benefits society as a whole. While there has been recent growth in the number and professionalism of youth organizations, much remains to be done to pave avenues of meaningful participation in mainstream governmental work focusing on cross-cultural understanding. Youth organizations generate impressive expertise in exploring innovative means to foster intercultural dialogue for the benefit of all society. This knowledge and creativity are assets that need to be harnessed by governmental

decision-makers for the elaboration, implementation and monitoring of national policies and programs related to cultural diversity.

Key questions:

- Youth will inherit the results of what is done today to address the issues related to cross-cultural tensions. However, youth are rarely key partners in the search for solutions. What is the current state of youth participation in national governments efforts to advance cross-cultural understanding?
- What are the main challenges in mainstreaming the voice of youth in governments' efforts to leverage cultural and religious diversity?
- What are some of the good practices to foster youth participation in this sector?
- How can steady and broad participation from marginalized youth be promoted?

Speakers:

- Ms. Danya Bashir, Youth Representative, Libya
- Mr. Lawrence Chuma, Youth for the United Nations Association, Tanzania
- Dr. Federico Mayor, President, Foundation for the Culture of Peace
- Ms. Olenka Ochoa, Human Rights Activist, Peru
- His Excellency Ambassador Martin Sajdik, Permanent Representative of Austria to the United Nations
- Mr. Aleksandar Simic, Composer

Question & Answer

5:00-5:10

Sum-up and Closing

- His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the United Nations General Assembly
- Prof. Mustapha Tlili, Director, New York University Center for Dialogues, and Special Advisor to the President of the United Nations General Assembly

**INTERACTIVE THEMATIC DEBATE
ON FOSTERING CROSS-CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING
FOR BUILDING PEACEFUL AND INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES**

(22 March 2012, Conference Room 2, United Nations headquarters)

CONCEPT

The President of the 66th session of the General Assembly, in partnership with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, will convene an interactive thematic debate on fostering cross-cultural understanding for building peaceful and inclusive societies. Special attention will be given to the role of youth in achieving these objectives.

This debate aims to support ongoing initiatives within the United Nations to promote intercultural dialogue, especially initiatives of the Alliance of Civilizations. General Assembly resolution A/RES/64/14 of 22 December 2009 expressed its continuing support for the work of the Alliance and welcomed efforts by the Secretary General and his High Representative.

Global peace and sustainable development can only be achieved if there is shared appreciation of cultural diversity. Exchanges and collaborative relations among civilizations and cultures are essential prerequisites for peace and development. When economic development and prosperity run mainly along cultural lines, this may heighten existing cultural divides. Strengthening human security, ensuring mutual respect and understanding among cultures, and advancing development in a sustainable and equitable way are essential pillars of the human endeavor in the 21st century. How can we put cultural diversity at the service of peace and development? What role can mediation and other peaceful means for conflict prevention and resolution play to build peaceful societies?

Given that in most regions of the world, young adults outnumber any other demographic group, they should be major players in fostering intercultural understanding and cooperation. Supporting youth participation in efforts to advance collaborative relations among cultures is crucial to stabilize a nation and advance positive social change regarding cultural and religious diversity. This is also important to ensure sustainable and peaceful development. Tomorrow, youth will inherit both the success and the failures of today's efforts. How can we partner with them to benefit from their contribution? In this regard, how both traditional and new media can enhance this search for a better world?

At the informal thematic debate, these and other related questions will be discussed, with the participation of high level officials, senior academic personalities, civil society and youth leaders. Following the debate, a summary note will be prepared and made available.