

6 September 2013

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Vuk Jeremić,
President of the 67th Session of the General Assembly,
at the High-Level Forum on the Culture of Peace**

Your Holiness,
Mr. Deputy-Secretary-General,
Respected Ministers,
Dear Guests,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my distinct honor to welcome you to the United Nations General Assembly's Second Annual High-level Forum on the Culture of Peace.

I feel humbled that my spiritual leader, His Holiness Patriarch Irinej of Serbia, has accepted the invitation to deliver a missive of peace to this distinguished House. His wise stewardship of the throne of Saint Sava is ensuring that our Church continues to serve as a custodian of our identity in these trying times. Your Holiness, allow me to wish you mnogajajeta. We look forward to hearing your remarks.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to the other two keynote speakers for this morning: Dr. Sayyid Syeed, the National Director of the Office of Interfaith and Community Alliances of the Islamic Society of North America, and Dr. Elie Abadie, the founding rabbi of the Edmond J. Safra Synagogue—whose message has been pre-recorded, on account of Jewish new year celebrations.

Let me also acknowledge the hard work and dedication of the Deputy-Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Jan Eliasson. As Ban Ki-moon's second-in-command, he has actively participated in the UN's various peace-building programs. We are truly indebted to him for this and other contributions to the international community.

I am grateful to the People's Republic of Bangladesh for its leading role in promoting this initiative from its inception. At today's event, they are represented by two members of Cabinet: my good old friend, Her Excellency Ms. Dipu Moni, and His Excellency Mr. Abul Kalam Azad—ministers of foreign and cultural affairs.

Allow me also to express my deep appreciation to the Adviser to the President of the Philippines, Secretary Teresita Quintos Deles, and last but certainly not least, to His Excellency Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury—founder of the Global Movement for the Culture of Peace NGO, with whom we have been working closely to organize this event.

I look forward to your contributions, and to those of the moderators and speakers who will participate in our three panels.

Once again, thank you all for being here.

Excellencies,

Maintaining international peace and security is the first stated purpose of the United Nations. It is enshrined in this Organization’s Charter, written in the wake of humanity’s epic victory over fascism, by countries united in their determination to “save succeeding generations from the scourge of war.”

Together, they conceived a Grand Parliament of sovereign equal States, in the expectation that its litany of endeavors would lead mankind to turn its “swords into plough shares.” Each nation was given a seat around the high table of peace, where dialogue was endowed with greater value than force, and concord granted preeminence over strife.

In the decades that have followed, the blessings of amity were repeatedly put to the test by the strong pull of the recourse to arms.

For all the transgressions, however, the quest for peace at the United Nations did not recede, in the fervent hope that despite all setbacks, the grand aspirations expressed in the Charter by the Organization’s founders would take hold in all corners of the world.

Excellencies,

Fourteen years ago, the Program of Action on the Culture of Peace was adopted by consensus in the General Assembly, identifying eight specific areas of action at all levels—the individual, the family, the community, the nation, and the world.

Member States rightly chose to put education first on the list, inspired in no small measure by what Mahatma Gandhi had enjoined three-quarters of a century ago, that “if we are to teach real peace in this world, and if we are to carry on a real war against war, we shall have to begin with the children.”

To effectively meet the challenges of the 21st century, I believe the generations to come should be instilled with the ethics of non-violence, and equipped with the right tools to flourish as adults—as future parents, responsible community leaders, and engaged citizens. We must impart them with the skills, dispositions, and knowledge they will need in order to make valiant contributions to their respective societies.

In the classroom and the home, through the books they read and the webpages they browse, we must ensure that our children learn to act with tolerance and understanding of others, forswearing violence—which only begets more of the same. They must learn more about equality of opportunity and social justice; human dignity and rights; love of one’s neighbor and compassion for the most vulnerable.

They must also learn that every religious tradition has its own authentic version of these noble teachings, worthy of profound respect.

Excellencies,

I think the importance of the power of faith to advance the culture of peace has often been understated.

We have repeatedly failed to employ it against the falseness of those who misuse any holy scripture to advance nefarious ends.

I am convinced this is where benevolent religious leaders—by expounding on the core ethical tenets we hold in common—may make a decisive difference. By further reaching out to one another, on equal footing, they would put their considerable moral authority in the service of healing the wounds of centuries of conflict between peoples of different faiths.

The alternative is a stark one: to face, virtually defenseless, the escalating danger that the ills and grievances of bygone eras may continue to be reawakened. This threatens to engulf us in a maelstrom of unmatched ferocity.

Excellencies,

We must aim to foster harmony amongst religions in the Age of Sustainable Development—a time of growing interdependence and multiplying challenges no country can hope to solve on its own.

We are truly becoming a global community, one in which the solemn entreaty of the UN Charter—to “practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors”—has never been more pressing.

The complexity of the task brought forth last June in Rio de Janeiro at the historic UN Conference on Sustainable Development is unprecedented. For the first time ever, world leaders agreed to comprehensively integrate the three dimensions of development—namely economic, social, and environmental—into a single, fully coherent sustainable whole.

Over the next 900 days, the General Assembly will need to formulate and adopt the Sustainable Development Goals; design options for financing them; and establish workable arrangements for monitoring their implementation.

We must be ready to begin a universal transition to sustainability by 2015. We cannot afford to delay the start of a process that, once completed, will have fundamentally transformed the ways in which humanity conducts its affairs.

The challenges of this enterprise are enormous—for it is perhaps the hardest and most complex diplomatic endeavor ever attempted in the United Nations.

We must not squander the opportunity to set the world on the path to sustainable development—and so bring forth a powerful handmaiden to our efforts to spread the culture of peace to every corner of the globe.

Excellencies,

Today, we are taking another small step towards overcoming strife and animus.

The commitment many of us have to advancing the culture of peace is informed by the remonstrance of the Psalmist to “turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it,” or by the injunction of the Qu’ran that “there is not for man [to do] except that good for which he strives.”

Holy books remind us that in creating mankind, God did not intend for us simply to be endowed with certain gifts and particular qualities. He created us “in His image” and called us to be completed “in His likeness,” so that we may humbly endeavor to come ever closer to Him—to become more ethical, more just, and more self-controlled, but also more mindful of the Eternal, the “one thing necessary.”

The wholehearted embrace of the culture of peace would propel us forward, and help make still and tranquil the ways of the world.

Excellencies,

Amongst all the leaders and statesmen ever to walk through the doors of the United Nations, few have been quite like Dag Hammarskjöld.

I believe we may draw inspiration from the tempered words he once wrote, during his tenure as Secretary-General of the United Nations.

It is with them that I wish to conclude my remarks:

“Our work for peace must begin within the private world of each one of us. To build for man a world without fear, we must be without fear. To build a world of justice, we must be just.[...] How can we ask others to sacrifice if we are not ready to do so? [...] Only in true surrender to the interest of all can we reach that strength and independence, that unity of purpose, that equity of judgment which are necessary if we are to measure up to our duty to the future, as men of a generation to whom the chance [is] given to build [...] a world [culture] of peace.”

Thank you for your attention.