

Statement by Mr. Prakash Javadekar, Member of Parliament on agenda items:
Culture of peace at the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly on
October 17, 2011

Mr. President,

I am deeply honoured and privileged to participate in today's joint debate under the agenda items of Culture of Peace and express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the Secretary General for his comprehensive reports on inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-civilizational dialogue.



We note with deep satisfaction that celebration of the International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures (2010) and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010) provided a unique opportunity for the UN system to reaffirm its fundamental commitment to the plurality of humanity, in which cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue are mutually reinforcing. This is exactly what Indian ethos stands for.

Mr. President,

In today's world we are witnessing the rise of extremism and intolerance, outbreak of sectarian violence and increasing use of language of hatred and violence. These pose a serious challenge to the very foundations of our society. Here we must salute Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King who proved power of non-violence.

Mr. President,

We need to create an environment conducive to fostering a dialogue between diverse cultures, races, faiths and religions that inculcates the values that promote transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace.

Dialogue amongst different cultures and religions is also important because it is precisely in the absence of such a dialogue and understanding, that intolerance, bigotry and violence flourish.

Mr. President,

It is heartening to note that the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) which includes a Group of Friends with 128 members has now become one of the premier platforms for intercultural and interreligious dialogue within and between diverse societies.

We welcome the Doha Pre-Forum and support the initiative to establish and further explore the linkage between AOC's mission and aims and Millennium Development Goals during the Doha AOC Forum.

Mr. President,

We support the Department of Public Information in its endeavor to strengthen its voice on intercultural dialogue by organizing and covering a wide range of events.

It may be mentioned that the Indian Mission associated itself with DPI and the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) in organizing an Authors Colloquium on "Unlearning Intolerance" at UN headquarters on May 5. The Indian Mission also organized a function to mark the International Day of non-Violence at the UN on September 30 this year, in which the Secretary General was the Chief Guest. India's leading historian Dr Ramachandra Guha delivered the keynote address.

Mr. President,

India, the largest democracy in the world, a nation of unparalleled diversity with a population of over one billion, is the second most populous nation in the world.

While India, of course, has the largest Hindu population, we also have one of the largest Muslim populations in the world.

And India provides a home to very significant number of practitioners of practically every other major religion of the world, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism or the Bahais. India is the birthplace of Jainism. Gautam

Buddha gave his first sermon in Sarnath, an eminent centre of Indian philosophy, after he attained enlightenment in Bodh Gaya. All this happened as our kings offered land and facilities to all religions.

The history of India, in essence, is a narrative of conversations between different civilizations and, indeed, conversation with nature itself. India is home to scores of languages, hundreds of dialects, thousands of cuisines, a medley of races, colours, landscapes and cultures. This assimilation and accommodation of diversity has contributed to the richness of our composite culture and durability of our civilization. This is "Unity in Diversity".

Our civilizational legacy treats nature as a source of nurture and there is high value placed on living in harmony with nature. The Vedas are a repository for holistic development of the human-being in full harmony with its surroundings. The continuous strand of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" i.e. "the entire world is one family" has guided our constant interaction and exchange of thoughts with the outside world. The noble principles of life and spiritualism, including non-violence, have influenced successive generations of people worldwide.

Mr. President,

We, in India, understand the importance of building alliances between religions, cultures and ethnic groups and we have always supported all efforts to build bridges of understanding between nations, peoples, religions, cultures across the world.

It is our considered view that successful pluralism must be grounded on the basic tenets of mutual understanding and respect for diverse traditions. Indian ethos believes in tenet of "Ek Sat Wipra Bahudha Vandani" meaning that there are many ways to reach God. Indian ethos also treats believers and non-believers equally. This is also critical for harmonious development of all sections of the society, including gender equity and empowerment of women all over the world.

Mr. President,

The only way to achieve this goal is to move conceptually to a new dimension of dialogue and harmony among diverse cultures, races, faiths and religions so that all human beings can live in a sane and peaceful global society of our collective dreams.

Thank You.

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