

STATEMENT BY MR. VIJAY RAMNIKLAL RUPANI, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT AND MEMBER OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, ON THE CULTURE OF PEACE AT THE 64TH SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON NOVEMBER 10, 2009



Mr. President,

I am deeply honoured and privileged to participate in today's discussions under the agenda item 'Culture of Peace'.

Please allow me to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Secretary General for his comprehensive report on inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, understanding and

cooperation for peace that outlines the ongoing processes and future initiatives envisaged in this field. In this context, we are happy to co-sponsor the resolution on International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World 2001-2010.

We are also happy to co-sponsor another major initiative in this area of the Alliance of Civilizations. India is a member of the Group of Friends and we are pleased to note that this initiative has gained momentum.

Mr. President,

We are extremely satisfied to co-sponsor the resolution on the Nelson Mandela International Day, which was endorsed by the special declaration adopted at the XV NAM Summit at Sharm El-Sheikh. We express our rich tributes to Nelson Mandela, a visionary and great leader of our times, whose life has been deeply influenced by Mahatma Gandhi - the greatest apostle of peace and non-violence. The adoption of this resolution is a befitting compliment to the incessant struggle of this living legend in his dedication to the service of humanity, struggle against racial discrimination and promoting reconciliation and democracy internationally, and in the promotion of a culture of peace throughout the world.

Mr. President,

The Charter of the United Nations says that the peoples of the United Nations are determined to practice tolerance and live together in peace.

Peace and tolerance, therefore, form the core set of values that the United Nations has painstakingly promoted ever since its inception. These values, attitudes and ways of life underscore freedom, justice, solidarity, and respect for diversity, dialogue and understanding.

Much of the conflict in today's world is driven by the absence of tolerance. Forces that would like the language of violence to replace the language of dialogue and peace fuel and stoke this conflict.

This violence is spreading its tentacles and threatening to destroy the moral values and the fabric of tolerance and composite culture that has propelled progress for humankind. The magnitude of these problems requires, more than ever before, for all human beings to work together in finding new solutions.

Mr. President,

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

Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach that is built on trust, dialogue and collaboration. Albert Einstein rightly noted, "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding."

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

This is the reason why extremist ideologies, violence and terrorism, have grown in a world in which we seem to be moving away from dialogue and understanding.

There can be no disputing that terrorism, which is a manifestation of extremism, intolerance and violence, is the antithesis of all religions. All acts of extremism and intolerance run counter to the central teachings of any religion, as all faiths are based on the universal values of peace, goodness and humanity. No religion condones violence or the killing of human beings.

Mr. President,

The history of India is a story of conversations between different civilizations. We have a tradition of respect and give and take between faiths and cultures.

India is today home to the most diverse mix of people professing different faiths having in our midst some of the largest populations of the great religions of the world.

The interaction between India and the West goes back to the time of ancient Greece. Millennia ago, the interaction between these two civilizations produced the Milindapanha, a record of the conversations between the Greek King Menander and a Buddhist sage, Nagasena. It also produced the exquisite Gandhara art form.

India's contact with Islam produced the great edifice of the Indo-Islamic culture, including the beautiful traditions of sufism.

We in India understand the importance of building alliances among religions, cultures and ethnic groups.

As a nation of unparalleled diversity, Indians would not have succeeded in holding together and strengthening a composite Indian identity unless Indians practiced tolerance and were determined to live together in peace.

Mr. President,

India supports all efforts to build bridges of understanding between nations, peoples, religions, and cultures across the many fault-lines that exist. In this context, India feels that the initiatives which further and expand on these objectives are timely and valuable.

Mahatma Gandhi had rightly said, "Intolerance is itself a form of violence and an obstacle to the growth of a true democratic spirit".

In India, we are disturbed by the rise of intolerance worldwide. We are troubled by the increase in resources, financial and otherwise, that are being made available to violent and intolerant groups that misuse religion to justify and propagate their extremist agendas. The effort to counter such tendencies diverts attention and much-needed resources from development efforts in the developing world, including India.

Moreover, the destructive activities of such groups have potentially serious consequences to social stability, peace and tranquility. It is therefore imperative that the nations of the world come together to tackle the menace of terrorism and extremism, which are an anathema for modern societies.

We need to be clear that abetting knowingly or even unknowingly the spread of fundamentalism and terrorism is like feeding a monster that will turn around and consume us.

The dialogue also needs to send out a strong message about the responsibility of nation states to do all that they can do in their power to promote tolerance and respect. They must do so at all levels, within nations, within regions and within the broader international community.

Thank you

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