

*Agenda Item 32: UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations*

*Statement by Mr. Kamallesh Sharma, PR on November 13, 2000*

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Mr. President,

At the outset, I would like to thank Ambassador Hadi Nejad Hosseinian, Permanent Representative of Islamic Republic of Iran for introducing the resolution and for the efforts undertaken by Iran in pursuing this theme over the last two years. We would like to also thank the Secretary General for his succinct report (A/55/492 and Corr. 1) which poses pertinent questions before us, particularly his observation that, "It is the perception of diversity as a threat that has made so many overlook the common humanity that unites us all."

As I have already made a more extensive statement on the theme of Dialogue Among Civilizations in the opening debate in 1998, Mr. President, I will restrict myself to a few observations stemming from the above observation.

It has been observed earlier that diversity is the foundation of this house of the United Nations. This is a truth that we should grasp and imbibe, internalise in our thought and action and hold on to as if our joined destiny depended upon it. Seeking a unity of collective human purpose and belonging and celebrating this vast and rich mosaic of civilizational variety, which is the essence of the Nations United, enhances both the common bond as well as the variegated splendour of the highest attainments of our shared humanity. Our aspiration at the turning of the millennium should be to erase the sense of separation and cherish our marvellous variety as a common inheritance, which nourishes us all and deepens and enriches our consciousness and sense of ourselves. It should expand our sense of belonging so that another peoples' pain is felt by us as our own and deprivation and indignity of poverty in the lives of any part of the human family is felt as insupportable for ourselves. It should make us eager to reap the rewards of the human insights and the highest accomplishments in the life of the spirit, thought, literature and art in any group of the global community. A globalisation of the spirit and of human fellowship, resting on the bedrock of variety, must accompany the homogenising globalisation of our economic and technocratic life.

We largely share the broad contours of the conceptual terrain outlined in the Secretary General's report (paragraph 5). However, while elaborating on the "indignities", we feel our vision should not be constricted, lest we miss the broader picture of the experience of all the world's societies and communities. Media prominence should certainly not be our guide to what demands scrutiny. The story of enslavement, disempowerment and subjugation in all respects of what have now been converted into developing societies holds both a grave lesson, instruction and a call for a healing commitment and responsibility.

We would caution against any misinterpretation of the dialogue among civilizations as signifying a dialogue among religions. The Indic civilization, from time immemorial, has been characterised by inclusiveness, and not exclusiveness, of spiritual experience. Conceiving of the world as one family, or '*vasudhaiva kutumbakam*', has been a guiding

inspiration. It is also the experience of other cultures that the idea of civilization transcends religious affinities. This perspective is even more central for a dialogue among civilizations for we need to throw bridges over which a vast traffic of understanding will flow from all sides and consolidate a sense of unity transcending division. Respect for all religious, linguistic and cultural manifestations has been the core of Indian civilizational values. The Director General of UNESCO has aptly observed recently, "Civilization and Religion are not synonymous terms .... Cultures have not necessarily identified themselves with any single creed". While promoting the Dialogue among Civilizations we need to be clear on this distinction.

We have also metaphorically visualised the Dialogue among Civilizations as a confluence of great streams, some ancient and therefore running deep, others young and ebullient with the vitality of invention. We should drink from all these life giving waters and draw sustenance and strength. This flow is without end. We wonder, therefore, at the usefulness of starting to think of the initiatives of the type envisaged in the report to give a so-called "befitting conclusion" to the UN Year of Dialogue among Civilizations through a "specific diplomatic initiative". We feel that our endeavour should rather be to give a launching to the dialogue in its widest sense during the Year so that we may continue to reap the benefit of the sense of solidarity and common purpose in a shared endeavour, which would inform all forms of collaboration among us.

Over the past half century, the UN has served as a host to all nations, promoting reconciliation and a culture of dialogue among them. Search for common moral and ethical values has led to the codification of a range of international instruments concerning tolerance, human rights, cultural cooperation and cooperation in science and technology. Values of democracy, human rights, pluralism and respect for rule of law, all civilisational influences, have acquired almost universal validity. Dialogue among and within nations and civilizations can and must promote understanding, pluralism and diversity as essential components of progress and human advancement. The central question that we have to grapple with is how to forge societies that are truly liberal and multicultural, but which retain a sense of unity and a corpus of common values: how they can best contribute to the emergence of a truly shared and liberal "human civilization": how the Dialogue among Civilizations can deal effectively with the menaces that afflict and threaten to drown our civilizational heritage, such as poverty and underdevelopment, hunger and disease, the emergence of xenophobia, racism, extremism, terrorism and actions of the 'uncivil society'.

Unprecedented advances in science and technology hold out the promise of great material progress and development. Breakthroughs in information technology are creating new direct cultural interface across the people of the world and offer an unique possibility of intensifying productive exchanges in diverse fields. Science and technology also provides valuable tools for historic preservation, documentation and wide dissemination of the cultural heritage of all civilizations. We agree with the Secretary General that the promotion of identity and cultural diversity, could, in itself, become the very substance of dialogue among civilizations. Instead of viewing diversity as a threat, we should as stated so eloquently by our Heads of State and Government in the Millennium Declaration, respect one another, in all our diversity of belief, culture and language, promoting an active culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations. The parameters of this Dialogue should move away from the traditional but limited approach of better knowledge of each other and understanding of our peculiarities, to a greater appreciation of diversity as a variation on

**the theme of humanity and its unlimited potential and the enlarging of a common denominator of values and principles on which our shared humanity rests.**

**We commend the Secretary General for pointing out that “our world has never been more integrated, more vulnerable and more unequal”. We live through these ironies and dilemmas. A Dialogue among Civilizations, which hopefully will unite the advances of all civilizations, will succeed if it fosters the universal urge in our hearts for justice and equity, conscience and compassion, harmony and coherence. It must promote a sense of indivisible mutual belonging and the conviction that all, without distinction, must participate in the advancement of human civilization. We observe that the resolution to be adopted by this Assembly rightly notes that civilizations are not confined to nation-States, but rather encompass different cultures. Nor should maintenance and promotion of identities and protection of cultural and civilizational traditions ever become a tool to shield ultra-nationalism and exclusionism. Exceptionalism and exclusivism are the roots of a Clash of Civilizations, they cannot advance a Dialogue among Civilizations.**

**Mr. President,**

**A year ago, my distinguished colleague, Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation had said, “we should develop our dialogue in the direction of joint efforts of all States and nations, in their struggle against violence, extremism, terrorism, poverty, hunger and disease - against all those disasters which deny the very essence and the foundation of any civilization.” Instead of viewing the Dialogue from the prism of divisiveness, we must ensure that it promotes and consolidates the principles of pluralism and democracy, acceptance of diversity and mutual respect, freedom and equality, solidarity and a sense of shared responsibility. The Dialogue must bring out the uniting features of our civilizations, all of which have contributed to the human saga, while preserving those distinctive features of a civilization which gives it a distinctive genius and adds to the totality of human richness. India will contribute, in thought and in action, to this endeavour.**