

*Bism Allah Al-Rahman Al-Raheem*

Mr. President,

I have the honour to introduce, on behalf of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the 29 other co-sponsors — Albania, Azerbaijan; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Costa Rica; the Dominican Republic; Egypt; El Salvador; Georgia; Guatemala; Guyana; Honduras; Kazakhstan; Kuwait; Liberia; Libya; Mauritius; Morocco; Oman; Paraguay; Qatar; the Russian Federation; Saudi Arabia; Tanzania; Tunisia; Turkey; the United Arab Emirates; Uruguay and Yemen, the draft resolution A/65/L5 entitled the ‘World Interfaith Harmony Week’.

Allow me to explain in brief the reasoning behind this resolution which was launched by H.M. King Abdullah II bin Al-Hussein before the United Nations General Assembly on September 23<sup>rd</sup> 2010. As this august assembly is well aware, our world is rife with religious tension and, sadly, mistrust, dislike and hatred. These religious tensions can easily erupt into communal violence. They also facilitate the demonizing of the other which in turn predisposes public opinion to support war against peoples of other religions. Thus, for example, according to the results of the 2008 Gallup Poll — one of the largest international religious surveys in history — 53% of Westerners have ‘unfavorable’ or ‘very unfavorable’ opinions of Muslims and 30% of Muslims polled worldwide hold negative views of Christians.

The misuse or abuse of religions can thus be a cause of world strife, whereas religions should be a great foundation for facilitating world peace. The remedy for this problem can only come from the world’s religions themselves. Religions must be part of the solution, not part of the problem. Much good work has already been done towards this — starting really with

the Second Vatican Council from 1962-1965 — by hundreds of intra-faith and interfaith groups all over the world and of all religions. Yet the forces inciting inter-religious tensions (notable among them being religious fundamentalisms of various kinds) are better organized, more experienced, better coordinated, more motivated and more ruthless. They have more stratagems, more institutes, more money, more power and garner more publicity such that they by far outweigh all the positive work done by the various interfaith initiatives. The sad proof of this is that religious tensions are on the rise, not on the decline.

Mr. President,

The present draft resolution seeks to turn the tide against this negative movement by:

- 1) Co-ordinating and uniting the efforts of all the interfaith groups doing positive work with one focused theme at one specific time annually, thereby increasing their collective momentum and eliminating redundancy.
- 2) Harnessing and utilizing the collective might of the world's second-largest infrastructure (that of places of worship — the largest being that of education) specifically for peace and harmony in the world: inserting, as it were, the right 'software' into the world's religious 'hardware'.
- 3) Permanently and regularly encouraging the silent majority of preachers to declare themselves for peace and harmony and providing a ready-made vehicle for them to do so. Moreover, if preachers and teachers commit themselves on the record once a year to peace and harmony, this means that when the next inter-religious crisis or provocation

occurs, they cannot then relapse into parochial fear and mistrust, and will be more likely to resist the winds of popular demagoguery.

Mr. President,

Turning now to the text itself, allow me to explain some of its most essential terminology and concepts:

- 1) In the very title of the resolution and in the second operative paragraph and elsewhere, the word ‘harmony’ is used in the Chinese sense of the term. We add it to the term ‘tolerance’ (which we have also used) because ‘tolerance’ can suggest that the other is so negative they have to be ‘tolerated’; we cannot use ‘acceptance’ because it implies that religions accept each other’s doctrines — rather than their right to those doctrines — and this is not the case; we cannot use the term ‘peace’ alone because it suggests merely the absence of war, and not necessarily the absence of hatred. Only the Confucian concept of ‘harmony’ can rescue us here because it suggests not merely ‘peace’, but also ‘beautiful and dynamic interaction between different elements within a whole’.
  
- 2) In the third operative paragraph, there is mention of ‘Love of God and Love of the Neighbor, or Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbor’. Why is this religious reference necessary in a UN resolution?

In answer to this question, it will be noted first that this draft resolution is unique because it is specifically about peace between

religions and not about anything else, therefore some religious references in this particular case is only natural. To rigidly maintain the contrary would be to disregard the feelings of 85% of the world's population which belongs to one or another faith.

Second — and more importantly perhaps — we include these references because whilst we all agree that it is clearly not the business of the UN to engage in theology, it is nevertheless the primary goal of the UN to make and safeguard peace, and without the specific mention of God and of the Two Commandments of Love [see: Matthew 22:34-40 and Mark 12:28-31] many — if not most — devout Muslims, Christians and Jews will consider a secular call for an interfaith harmony week a feckless platitude that they cannot fully or sincerely support. For in the Holy Bible Jesus Christ ﷺ (echoing the words of Deuteronomy) said: *Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word of God* [Luke 4:4 and Matthew 4:4, see also: Deuteronomy 8:2-3] and also that: *Hallowed be Thy Name* [Matthew, 6:9], and similar meanings are to be found in the Holy Qur'an wherein it is stated that no act is rewarded *Save for seeking the Countenance of ...[the] Lord, the Most High* [Al-Layl, 92:19-20] and that: *... Verily the Remembrance of God is of all things the greatest...* [from: Al-Ankabut, 29:45]. In other words, for many Muslims, Christians and Jews — who together make up perhaps 55% of the world's population and (I regret to say) are involved in most of the world's conflicts — it is necessary to mention the Substance of their faiths. Otherwise, hoping to foster peace between religions by foisting upon them an external and purely secular and bureaucratic

language is simply *a house divided against itself which shall not stand* [Matthew, 12:25].

Third, it will be noted that this language excludes no one, of any religion or of no faith at all: every person of good will, with or without faith can and should commit to Love of the Neighbour and Love of God *or* Love of the Neighbour and Love of the Good. Loving the neighbour and the good is after all the essence of good will. And referring to ‘the Good’ obviously does not necessarily imply belief in God or in a particular religion, even though for many believers ‘the Good’ is God precisely: Jesus Christ ﷺ said: ‘*No one is Good but God Alone*’ [Mark, 10:18; Luke 18:19, and Matthew 19:17], and ‘the Good’ (‘*Al-Barr*’) is one of God’s Names in the Holy Qur’an [Al-Tur, 52:28]. Thus speaking of ‘the Good’ is a theologically-correct but inclusive formula — in so far as it goes — that unites all humanity and leaves out no one.

Fourth, there is another reason why it is specifically necessary to mention love of the neighbour: it sets an invaluable practical standard based upon which people can ask themselves and each other if their actions stem from *caritas* (love) towards the neighbour or not. Indeed, as the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ said: “*None of you has faith [in God] until you love for your neighbour what you love for yourself.*” [Sahih Muslim, Kitab al-Iman, Vol. p.67, Hadith no.45].

- 3) Also in the third operative paragraph, the phrase ‘on a voluntary basis’ is used because the entire proposal *must* be purely voluntary. No place of worship should be forced to observe the World Interfaith Harmony Week; for whilst we hope to encourage interfaith harmony, the last

thing we want is for anyone at all to feel that anything is being imposed on his or her faith, beliefs or convictions. Nevertheless, one can conceive of positive incentives to encourage and help support and monitor the implementation of this resolution.

- 4) Finally, also in the third operative paragraph, the phrase ‘each according to their own religious traditions or convictions’ is vital because the different religions do not necessarily interpret ‘Love of God and the Neighbour’ in exactly the same way, and do not all want it said that they do. This phrase thus avoids the dangers of syncretism or reductionism and allows for religious differences within the same goal of working towards inter-religious peace and harmony.

In summary, then, I very humbly ask the member states of the United Nations General Assembly to adopt the proposed draft resolution for the World Interfaith Harmony Week, noting that it excludes no individual, compromises no one, commits no one, forces no one, harms no one, costs nothing, and — on the contrary — includes everyone, celebrates everyone, benefits everyone, unites everyone and has the potential to bring much needed Peace and Harmony to the entire world *in sha Allah*. Thank-you Mr. President.

## **World Interfaith Harmony Week**

*The General Assembly,*

*Recalling* its resolutions 53/243 of 6 October 1999 on the declaration and program of action relating to a culture of peace; 57/6 of November 2002 concerning the promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence; 58/128 of 19 December 2003 on the promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation; 64/164 of 18 December 2009 on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief; 64/81 of 7 December 2009 on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, and 64/14 of 10 November 2009 on the Alliance of Civilizations;

*Recognizing* the imperative need for dialogue among different faiths and religions in enhancing mutual understanding, harmony and cooperation among people;

*Recalling* with appreciation various global, regional and sub-regional initiatives on mutual understanding and interfaith harmony including, *inter alia*, the Tripartite Forum for Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, and the 'A Common Word',

*Recognizing* that the moral imperatives of all religions, convictions, and beliefs call for peace, tolerance, and mutual understanding:

1. *Reaffirms* that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace;
2. *Proclaims* the first week of February of every year the World Interfaith Harmony Week between all religions, faiths and beliefs;
3. *Encourages* all States to support, on a voluntary basis, the spread of the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill in the world's Churches, Mosques, Synagogues, Temples and other places of Worship during that week based on Love of God and Love of the Neighbor, or based on Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbor, each according to their own religious traditions or convictions;
4. *Requests* the Secretary-General to keep the General Assembly informed of the implementation of the present resolution.

G.M.T.