Hon'ble Madam President,

Distinguished Leaders,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address this important gathering on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace.

I felicitate you, President Arroyo and the Government of Philippines for hosting this meeting, which Pakistan has the honor to co-sponsor, together with fifteen other States.

Faith should be a source of individual and collective strength, promoting moral conduct and providing a framework of values for human action and endeavor. Faith can also be a powerful instrument for social and political mobilization to achieve collective goals.

It is unfortunate that great religions – which should be a source of hope, tolerance and peace – are today seen to be pitted against each other. The need to promote cooperation and understanding among religions and cultures is no longer an option in our globalized world. It is a political and moral imperative.

Throughout history, confrontations between faiths and civilizations, when they occurred, were motivated by competing political or economic interests rather than incompatibility between the fundamental precepts of religions. Today also, the manifestation of misunderstanding and friction between cultures and civilizations are not the result of religious differences. They arise from divergent political perspectives on some important issues. This is certainly so in the relations between the West and the Islamic world.

In the Muslim world, there is a general belief that the West is deliberately suppressing or allowing the suppression of Muslim peoples in Palestine, Kashmir and elsewhere. In the West, all Muslims are, often collectively associated with what is so freely described as “Islamic Terrorism”. In the West, some go so far as to project Islam itself as the source of terrorism and extremism. Indeed, a large section of Muslim opinion believes that their eternal faith is being defamed and demonized.

In the past, religions and civilizations inhabited separate geographical space. Today, the phenomena of international migration, communications and information technology have, in many ways, blurred the geographical and other fault lines where specific faiths and cultures encounter
and interact with each other. Such close contact and interaction now takes place in the street, the
work place, the living room, on television and the internet. This greater interaction can serve to
enhance understanding and acceptance. Unfortunately, it often becomes the instrument for
friction and rejection.

It is necessary to promote a better understanding of different faiths and cultures; to
remove misunderstanding and deliberately propagated negative caricatures. It is important to
emphasize that the vast majority of the adherents of any faith are peaceful, tolerant, honest, just
and caring people. Those who hold militant views are a small minority and those who act on
these militant views are even fewer.

For several years, Pakistan has actively promoted religious and cultural understanding,
harmony and cooperation. In its last two Sessions, the General Assembly adopted two important
resolutions, co-sponsored by Pakistan on this issue. We support the several proposals which
have been advanced to promote religious and civilizational understanding: the Dialogue among
Civilizations, proposed by Iran; the Alliance of Civilizations, proposed by Spain and Turkey; this
Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, initiated by the Philippines; and the Strategy for Enlightened
Moderation, proposed by Pakistan.

However, dialogue alone is not enough. We must adopt and implement a comprehensive
strategy for action to promote understanding and cooperation between faiths and cultures. Such a
strategy should be inclusive – involving governments, civil society, private sector, media and
international organizations. It should cover the political, socio-economic, religious, cultural and
institutional aspects. It should be supported by adequate financial resources, from governments
and the private sector.

At the national level, each country should promote conscious action to counter extremism
within their societies. We must prohibit extremist organizations and hate literature; prevent the
misuse of places of worship for the promotion of extremist views; ensure that educational
institutions do not foster extremism or terrorism. We should adopt appropriate reforms in
educational curricula to promote the correct interpretation of various faiths and cultures; initiate
dialogue among our own people to build further understanding of the true spirit and values of their
own and other major religions; adopt conscious policies for the protection of religious minorities;
and take action to promote social and human development, in partnership with civil society and
private sector.

We also need to take a number of actions at the international level:
**Firstly**, it is imperative to promote an early resolution of political injustice to which so many people are being subjected due to their faith or belief.

**Secondly**, it is necessary to urgently resolve conflicts and disputes, especially where these involve friction between different religions and faiths e.g. in Palestine and Kashmir.

**Thirdly**, conscious decisions must be taken to extend development support to those societies, which have been challenged by the problems of interfaith friction or extremism. Such development support should be aimed at poverty eradication and generation of socio-economic growth and human development.

**Lastly**, interfaith dialogue should include religious leaders and scholars from across faiths and cultures, even some of those who hold extremist views and are un-enlightened about the virtues of other faiths, cultures and civilizations.

In this context, we welcome the Secretary-General’s forthcoming establishment of a Commission of Eminent Persons to promote “An Alliance of Civilizations”. I suggest that Secretary-General should also create a U.N. Office for Interfaith Cooperation.

**Madam President,**

It is not surprising that there are differences within and between societies, cultures, civilizations and religions. These differences and diversity are no cause for confrontation. Each one of us is a member of the same human family, with the same hope and aspiration to live a good and happy life in peace and prosperity. It is a good augury that the leaders of so many States, as well as international organizations and civil society, have come together today – united in our diversity and focused on one universal goal: enhancing cooperation and mutual understanding and, thereby promoting peace, security and prosperity for all the “peoples of the United Nations”.

I thank you Madam President.