Mr. President,

Today, we are considering two important subjects in this joint debate on agenda items 42 & 43.

The International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010 has entered its fifth year and I wish to felicitate the government of Bangladesh for bringing this initiative on the agenda of the General Assembly.

During this session, we are also reviewing the progress of the Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and its programme of Action adopted in the year 2001 for which we owe our gratitude to the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Pakistan has had a long association with both these initiatives and has been a traditional cosponsor of the two resolutions tabled by Bangladesh and Iran under these agenda items.

Mr. President

We are thankful to the Secretary General for his reports on the two agenda items, which provide an overview of the progress achieved on these initiatives in the last few years.

The Declaration on a Culture of Peace adopted by the General Assembly on 13 September 1999 is a set of values, attitudes and behaviours. This historic document is based on the principles of multilateral cooperation in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, respect for life, ending of violence and promotion and practice of non-violence through education, dialogue and cooperation, and commitment to peaceful settlement of conflicts.

In our globalized world, there is increased interaction among all cultures and civilizations. That has given rise to new forms of exchange and understanding among peoples across regions and has created unprecedented opportunities for transmission of ideas.

However, the greatest paradox of today's world is that while it has brought people closer and created vast networks of connectivity and inter-dependence, it has also spawned divisions and frictions among and within societies. Many of these divisions and frictions are manifested in religious tones and tenors.

The proliferation of sources and the channels of information have, instead of promoting a better understanding among peoples, quite often reinforced stereotypes and deepened misperceptions. Despite the surfeit of information, instantly available, the gulf of misunderstanding among faiths and civilizations seems to have grown wider. There is both a “knowledge deficit” and “understanding deficit”.

Mr. President

Many would agree that the root causes of friction between cultures and civilizations are not primarily religious differences. The central message of all religions is almost identical. The root causes of friction is not a clash of civilizations but are often a clash of political and economic interests. Clearly, responses to conflicting political interests are often cast in religious terms but this is only an expedient disguise for those pursuing narrow political and national objectives.
The need to promote cooperation and understanding among religions and cultures is, therefore, a contemporary imperative. Ethnicity, religion, culture, language or race must not be allowed to become a source of division. We must reassert our common humanity and our common and universal values. We must pursue dialogue among different faiths and build ‘bridges of friendship’, understanding and cooperation to ameliorate the sufferings of those who are the victims of intolerance, discrimination, oppression and injustice.

There has been an increasing recognition of the several initiatives put forth by some member States, in the recent years, to bridge the emerging divide between different religions, cultures and civilizations.

The proposal of Iran for a Dialogue among Civilizations; Pakistan’s proposal for Enlightened Moderation; the initiative of interfaith cooperation for peace from Philippines and the recently launched proposal for Alliance of Civilizations are mutually reinforcing and seek to promote universal human welfare, freedom and progress. All of these initiatives can serve as instruments to eliminate the misunderstandings among faiths and an antidote to the notion of "clash of civilizations".

It is of vital importance that the international community should encourage inter-religious and intercultural dialogue and cooperation. We agree with the recommendations of the Secretary General’s report (A/60/279) that a global framework should be promoted to integrate the various objectives of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

There is a need to develop coordination mechanisms at the international, regional and national levels to strengthen cooperation between all relevant actors: the United Nations System, Member States, civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations.

At the international level, any endeavour for interfaith harmony and cooperation should cover political, socio-economic, religious and cultural and institutional aspects. The way forward is to foster mutual understanding and enlightenment and concentrate on the development of human resources, poverty alleviation, education and social justice.

At the political level, interfaith harmony require the rectification of political injustices to which people are often subjected due to their faith or belief.

Mr. President

Pakistan has sought to promote religious tolerance, understanding and cooperation at the platform of United Nations for several years. The 58th and 59th sessions of the General Assembly adopted Pakistan’s resolution entitled “Promotion of Religious and Cultural Understanding, Harmony and Cooperation” which emphasizes, inter alia, the need for strengthening freedom, justice, tolerance, cooperation and respect for diversity of culture and religions which are all important elements for building international peace and security.

This year also Pakistan will table a resolution under this agenda item highlighting the principles to enhance human well-being and freedom by uniting our efforts to secure universal peace. It is our hope that the General Assembly will again adopt Pakistan’s resolution on promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation by consensus. This will be a manifestation of our collective resolve to promote peace, prosperity and hope for all and a categorical rejection of intolerance, hate and discrimination.

I thank you Mr. President.