Pakistan’s statement on agenda item 44:  
“Culture of Peace”

Madam President,

Today, we are considering the important agenda item “Culture of Peace in this joint debate. We are thankful to the Secretary General for his report on this item contained in document A/61/175.

Pakistan has held longstanding association with this subject and has endeavoured to promote a culture of peace through its traditional resolution, entitled “Promotion of religious and cultural understanding, harmony and cooperation”, in the General Assembly. This resolution was adopted by consensus in the successive sessions of the General Assembly since the 58th UNGA (A/Res 58/128, A/Res 59/ 142 and A/Res/ 60/11).

Madam President,

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the “Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Belief” adopted by the General Assembly in 1981. The Declaration, in its article 3, professes “Discrimination between human beings on the grounds of religion or belief constitutes an affront to human dignity and a disavowal of the principles of the Charter of the United Nations, and shall be condemned as a violation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights”.

The Declaration encouraged the promotion of understanding, tolerance and respect for religion and belief and acknowledged that freedom of religion should contribute to the attainment of the goals of world peace, social justice and friendship among peoples and to the elimination of ideologies or practices of colonialism, racism and racial discrimination.

Building on the same principles, the General Assembly in 1999, adopted the historic ‘Declaration on a Culture of Peace’, which emphasized the promotion of multilateral cooperation, respect for life, ending of violence and freedom and practice of non-violence through dialogue, cooperation and commitment to peaceful settlement of disputes.

Madam President,
The significance of these international commitments for promoting tolerance and peace are particularly relevant in today’s globalized world where there is an increased interaction between all cultures and civilizations. Such close interaction has given rise to new forms of exchanges and understanding among peoples across the regions, and has provided unprecedented opportunities for transmission of ideas.

Ironically, these vast networks of connectivity and inter-dependence have not only brought peoples closer to each other but, at the same time, have spawned divisions and friction amongst and within societies. The proliferation of the sources and channels of information has, while promoting a better knowledge of other peoples, quite often, reinforced stereotypes and deepened differences and alienation. Indeed, the gulf of misunderstanding among faiths and civilizations seems to have grown wider. Quite often, these divisions and frictions are manifested in religious tones and tenors. There is both a knowledge deficit and understanding deficit.

Madam President,

As the world today is composed of States with diverse political, economic, social and cultural systems, determined by their history, tradition and cultural values, the stability of international peace and security can only be guaranteed by the universal recognition of the rights of all peoples and nations to freely determine their own approach towards progress and development. The role of the United Nations General Assembly is imperative in building an environment conducive for creating an equitable world order as envisaged in the Programme of Action on the Culture of Peace.

Acknowledging this important role, the President of the 60th Session of the General Assembly expressed strong commitment to the need for dialogue and understanding among civilizations, cultures and religions, to prevent provocative incidents and to evolve better ways of tolerance and respect for religions and beliefs. We hope that the 61st Session of the General Assembly, under the able leadership of its President, H.E. Sheikha Haya Rashed Al Khalifa, would carry forward this work and make a positive contribution to promote and advance the much needed dialogue on the important and sensitive issue of respect for religions.

Madam President,
The UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, in her report (contained in document A/61/340) to the 61st session has highlighted the alarming trend of religious intolerance in many regions of the world. The Rapporteur has noted with concern that “tolerance between religious communities was adversely affected by the actions carried by some governmental bodies and the negative role played by media in stigmatizing certain religious communities”.

The United Nations General Assembly as well as the Human Rights Council should assume the leading responsibility in evolving ways and means to help avert the worst consequences of defamation of religions manifested in instances of Islamophobia.

There are some embryonic legal elements in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, that deal with incitement to religious hatred. While there is a need to sincerely invoke and apply all these existing mechanisms to promote understanding among religions and civilizations, there is also an urgent need to fill the juridical vacuum and redress the paucity of relevant laws that address issues relating to religious intolerance.

In this regard, Pakistan would like to make the following proposals:

One, the General Assembly as well as the Human Rights Council, through their appropriate resolutions and decisions, should condemn religious intolerance and also address the defamation of religions, particularly the unwarranted linkage of Islam with violence and terrorism. The United Nations, in its endeavour to promote religious multi-culturalism, should appeal to the larger membership to deter and discourage antagonism and discrimination against Islam and Muslim peoples.

Two, the General Assembly, during its current Session, should hold a high-level event also involving the civil society organizations to focus on the issue of incitement to racial and religious hatred and promotion of tolerance.

Three, following the recommendations of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion Or Belief, the General Assembly should encourage Member States to commence consultations to develop a global strategy to address the issue of religious intolerance and to
develop a legally binding instrument to combat defamation of religion and prevent religious intolerance.

Madam President,

In order to promote harmony and cooperation among cultures and civilizations, President General Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan has advanced a strategy of “Enlightened Moderation” which highlights the principles of enhancing human welfare, freedom and progress everywhere, of forging harmony and understanding among all peoples and of seeking the peaceful resolution of conflicts and disputes. This strategy was endorsed by the Summit of Organization of Islamic Conference held in Putrajaya Malaysia in 2003.

In conclusion, I am glad to announce that in line with our past practice to promote a culture of peace at the United Nations, Pakistan will once again table a draft resolution on promoting religious and cultural understanding, in collaboration with Philippines during the 61st GA Session. This resolution, inter alia, emphasizes the need for strengthening freedom, justice, tolerance, cooperation and respect for diversity of cultures and religions, as important elements for building international peace and security.

It is our hope that the General Assembly will adopt this resolution by consensus, which will be a manifestation of our collective resolve to promote peace, prosperity and hope for all and a categorical rejection of intolerance, hatred and discrimination. It is imperative that ethnicity, religion, culture, language or race must not be allowed to become a source of divisiveness amongst our common humanity.

We, the representatives assembled here, must be the catalysts of cooperation, not the prophets of doom. We must affirm the indivisibility of the human race. We must reassert our common humanity and our common universal values. It is only thus that we can build a stable structure of peace and harmony among all the peoples of the United Nations.

I thank you, Madam President.
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STATEMENT

BY

SENATOR (R) MR. AKRAM ZAKI

MEMBER PAKISTAN DELEGATION TO THE 61ST SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

ON AGENDA ITEM 44:
“CULTURE OF PEACE”

AT THE PLENARY
OF THE
61ST SESSION OF THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY

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