

**UN GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 62<sup>ND</sup> SESSION**

**HIGH-LEVEL DIALOGUE ON  
INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL  
UNDERSTANDING AND COOPERATION FOR PEACE**

**ADDRESS**

**BY**

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TO THE UNITED NATIONS**

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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Mr. President,

Especially since the events of 9/11, there has been a growing concern about cross-cultural and interreligious tensions. Some have seen the world inevitably steering towards a “clash of civilizations”, a confrontation of monolithic, self-contained blocks. In discussing the challenges and opportunities of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, we must reject a static concept of culture and civilization as well as the notion that cultures are entities that must be protected against anything foreign. A culture or civilization evolves constantly over time, adapts to new conditions and settings and is formed in interaction with other cultures and identities.

Embracing a dynamic concept of culture and identity is therefore a precondition for a meaningful dialogue between civilizations and religions. It requires the willingness to learn and accept that one’s own way of looking at and doing things is neither the only nor necessarily the best one. Arrogance has no place in dialogue. In addition, dialogue between civilizations must not be distorted by differences in power: it must be inclusive and all participants must be treated equally. We should take the concern seriously that there is a trend towards the predominance of one culture over the others brought about by globalization and the present power structure.

Diversity yields many opportunities but it may be regarded as a threat because it challenges the ways of life we are used to and disturbs the comfort human beings find in stability and the preservation of the status quo.

Due to globalization, differences between cultures and religions have become starker as modern communication technologies and fast as well as affordable forms of transport have led to a world where people of different backgrounds are faced with the daily chance and necessity to interact. If we want to create a foundation for the cooperation for peace through the fostering of intercultural and interreligious understanding in these circumstances, we will have to find ways to address people’s fears and concerns regarding cultural and religious diversity. Education has to play a vital role in this respect.

Another key element is providing the fora for dialogue as one of the best ways to reduce prejudice is for people get to know and understand each other. Access to the media and to information technology is crucial for this purpose and bridging the digital divide is therefore an important prerequisite for advancing intercultural and interreligious understanding.

Mr. President,

Migration often leads to the transformation of relatively uniform communities to multicultural societies and thereby to new challenges with regard to social coherence and peace. Liechtenstein, e.g., has experienced a tremendous influx of immigrants since the end of World War II, mainly fueled by its economic success. With a 33.9 percentage of foreigners, the Government and inhabitants of Liechtenstein are confronted with the challenge of interreligious and intercultural understanding on a regular basis.

The Government has taken a series of measures to promote the integration of migrants, to fight xenophobia and racism and to enhance understanding between the different cultural and religious groups. One focus of Government policy lies on the provision of targeted services for migrants to learn the national language and to fulfill thereby one of the basic preconditions of dialogue as well as of socio-economic integration. Another main concern is the institutionalization of the dialogue between all cultural and religious groups in the country. Therefore, Liechtenstein's Prime Minister has held several round-table meetings with migrants' associations. As a follow-up, a networking platform for migrants' associations and organizations active in the field of integration and intercultural dialogue has been set up.

Mr. President,

As important as measures at the national level may be, the United Nations and other multilateral bodies such as the Council of Europe are certainly the adequate forum to establish an overall dialogue between civilizations and foster intercultural and interreligious

understanding. Let us join our efforts within these frameworks and develop a common answer to terrorism, intolerance and racism.

I thank you.