

PEACEFUL RESOLUTION OF CONFLICT:
MEDIATION THROUGH INTERFAITH DIALOGUES

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Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Assalamualaykum,

Peace be Upon All of Us,

First of all, I would like to express my gratitude to the President of the United Nations General Assembly and congratulate the United Nations for organizing this timely and urgent event. In that respect, my appreciation goes to His Majesty King Abdullah of Jordan for taking the initiative. I do believe that the commencement of the *World Interfaith Harmony Week* would strengthen our determination to keep working together, based on common ground, for the common good.

I would like also to convey the message of peace from Indonesia, the largest archipelago in the world with 17.000 islands, the most populous Muslim country, and the pluralistic nation with about 500 ethnic groups and languages, yet its people live in a peaceful co-existence and harmony, based on the Five Principles of *Pancasila*, and the national motto of *Bhineka Tunggal Ika*, or Unity in Diversity.

It is indeed a great honor for me to be here today, to share my experience and thought, through my organization, Muhammadiyah, on the topic of mediation of conflict. At the time when differences often lead to frictions, and frictions lead to conflicts, the search for peaceful ways of resolving differences and conflicts becomes imperative. In this regards, the significance of mediation as an instrument to resolve differences and to find common ground cannot be overstated.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The importance of peaceful resolution of differences and disputes becomes even more evident when we look at the reality of the world where we live in today. While poverty, illiteracy, disease, and injustice still present the most difficult challenges to humanity, we are also presented with the fact that violent conflicts and even wars continue to be the most devastating source of human suffering. Indeed, history has shown us that violent conflict and war becomes the worst enemy of mankind. History also teaches us how violent conflict and war could destroy not only communities and nations, but also civilization.

It is indeed disheartening to see that conflicts remain a defining characteristic of today's world. War, which we thought to be obsolete, continues to serve as an instrument by which nations resolve their differences. Thus, we should do our best to renounce the use of force and war as a means of conflict-resolution. Through war, human kind would not accomplish anything but misery. The use of forces will never resolve differences, and the use of violence will only breed more violence.

Differences, be it in religious, ethnic, cultural and even civilizational terms, would continue to be a fact of life. But, these differences should by no means become a reason why we cannot live in harmony and peace. In fact, Islam reminds us that God made us into different nations and tribes so that we might come to enhance mutual understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation (The Quran, 49: 13). Therefore perpetuating those differences in order to foment conflict is certainly against God's Law of Nature.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our main task is therefore to ensure that religion continues to serve as the basis of peace. We continue to work to ensure that religion will not be used, misused, and abused to justify act of violence in any forms. The Holy Qur'an strongly reminds us that whosoever killed a person without justified reason is that if he has killed all mankind and humanity (The Qur'an 5: 32).

When conflicts do occur, it is our task also to ensure that those conflicts are resolved peacefully, not through the use of violence. Here, we believe in the power of dialogue, and that interfaith dialogue could take the form of mediation between conflicting parties. It is true that sometimes conflicts have no religious motive, as religion is only used as a mean of justification, yet religious approach in conflict resolution is often fruitful.

It is my belief that more of these dialogues are needed. More exchanges of views and discussions among civilizations should be encouraged. Therefore, we should continue to make the dialogue among civilizations useful both at the elite and grass roots level. We should ensure that various activities to bridge the gap among civilizations would contribute to the enhancement of mutual understanding and respect in a concrete way.

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Mediation through interfaith dialogues would not be meaningful unless parties to such dialogues are able to articulate their point of views in a frank and candid manner. Dialogues would quickly turn into a political theater if we cannot be honest with each other. Fruitful dialogues could only be achieved in an environment that promotes candidness and honesty within a spirit of togetherness and friendship.

Faith-based organizations, like Muhammadiyah, whenever possible, can and should play a role in mediation effort to resolve conflict. We have played, and will continue to play, that role at community level. We have also played that role in order to bridge differences among communities at national level.

The challenge we are now facing is how to continue emphasizing the value of mediation through interfaith dialogues and cooperation as an instrument to bridge civilizational divides and conflicts at global level. Various initiatives in this area remind us that religion and religious leaders do have a positive role to play in international relations. Religion does

serve as a source of values and norms that could provide guidance for a healthy inter-state relations based on mutual understanding, mutual respects, and equality. Those dialogues also serve as a venue for religious leaders to articulate their aspiration for a peaceful and just world. At grass-root level, inter-faith dialogues and cooperation can provide the basis for peace among people of different faiths. Dialogues could remove mutual suspicions, which often result from ignorance, lack of knowledge about each other, and the absence of mutual respect.

Finally, it is my hope that the *2012 World Interfaith Harmony Week* would serve as an integral part of our effort to bridge divides among civilizations, among states, among nations, and among communities. It is also the hope of all of us who are here today that our relentless efforts will in the end yield to a peaceful, just, prosperous, and harmonious world.

Thank you.