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**High-Level Thematic Debate of the UN General Assembly  
on  
“Promoting Tolerance and Reconciliation:  
Fostering Peaceful, Inclusive Societies and Countering Violent Extremism”**

**21 April 2015**

**Intervention by  
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Permanent Representative**

Mr President,

Our deliberations on peace and ways to foster it will remain abstract musings if we do not apply them to the real life, to the real situations and people on the ground, if we do not try to make a real difference.

Sometimes we forget that despite the periods of conflicts, people have lived together for ages, mixing with and learning from each other, exchanging views, experiences, adopting various elements of others' cultures.

The task before us is to identify those cultural phenomena that have historically "glued" the communities of different backgrounds together in harmonious co-existence.

For me, these cultural unifying factors can be found in literature, oral and written traditions, artistic expressions, sites of common cultural heritage, even the examples of gastronomy! Understanding the indigenous forces and processes that promote tolerance, mutual acceptance and cooperation is the first step towards relearning how to focus on these positive factors. This is especially relevant in places where peace had broken down.

And the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind, of course, can only occur when we start to respect, even celebrate, our cultural diversity.

Multi-faith dialogue is an essential path towards the intellectual and moral solidarity of humankind. It can reveal the common ground within a multicultural society that enables the free practice of religion for all and the free expression of the plurality of views. Since faith represents a fundamental force behind many people's lives, multi-faith dialogue allows building relations in spheres that are very close to people, like culture, and religion. This is the reason why the reconciliation efforts are increasingly made through cultural and faith based diplomacy in many parts of the world.

Mr President,

I wish to thank your Excellency, as well as Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations for initiating today's high-level debate on promoting tolerance and reconciliation. Hungary fully aligns itself with the statement delivered by the European Union.

Multi-faith dialogue is essential for reconciliation. In places where conflict has related deep divisions, peace must be based on reconciliation that involves restoration of genuine peaceful relationships between and within societies. By

removing the bases for emergence or re-emergence of violence, reconciliation builds personal and social capacity for sustainable peace and contributes to the attainment of important human developmental goals, such as eradicating poverty, promoting gender equality, combating diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Reconciliation depends on societal attitudes that do not change overnight, even if the conflict has been resolved peacefully. These attitudes permeate major channels of communication, dominate public discourse, and eventually find expression in such cultural products as books, plays, and films. Reconciliation is therefore a long and complex process that requires sustained commitment from all stakeholders, including the international community, to enhance the indigenous capacity within a society to manage conflict without violence, as a means to overcome obstacles, solidify the peace process, and achieve human security. Reconciliation also depends on justice.

But, Mr. President,

Hungary is deeply concerned about the recent rise of violent extremism in many parts of the world.

We respect and acknowledge the importance of religions in creating and preserving values which are vital for the sustainability of the human society. As our constitution, the Fundamental Law of Hungary formulates it: *„We value the various religious traditions of our country”*. We are proud of our tradition of religious tolerance. It was the National Assembly of the Hungarian Transylvanian Principality that adopted a law on religious tolerance for the first time in the history of Europe, in 1568. The Torda Edict on Religious Tolerance, almost 450 years ago, declared, that *„no one should be forced to choose a preacher (...) but every community may keep a kind of preacher whose teaching they like. And for this (...) no preacher should be hurt, and nobody should be blamed for the religion, as faith is a gift of God”*. In the spirit of this noble tradition Hungary is deeply committed to the values of freedom of religion and belief.

Also in modern times, we must build on the inner potential of the respective religions to promote healing and reconciliation. Recognizing the importance of this matter for the global security, Hungary for example organized a **high-level conference on interreligious dialogue in 2011** with the participation of Christian, Jewish, Muslim scholars as well as decision-makers.

Hungary traditionally attaches great importance to the promotion and protection of the rights of persons belonging to national, ethnic, religious and linguistic **minorities**. Minorities are presented in the political decision-making on both the local and national levels. The representation of national and ethnic minorities is guaranteed in the local governments and in the Parliament as well, which ensures

their effective participation in the design and implementation of policies and programs.

Mr President,

It has to be admitted that religious conflicts or interethnic conflicts with religious aspects have caused much pain and suffering over the centuries and in many parts of our world. These pains are preserved in the collective memory of the communities and they often contribute to tensions of today. Ignoring these aspects of present-day conflicts is no solution: we must face them and our generation is obliged to do its best to heal them, for the sake of a peaceful future.

As part of the efforts to promote dialogue and combat Antisemitism, the Government has set up the so-called Jewish Community Roundtable, which provides a platform for continuous dialogue with Jewish communities in Hungary.

In line with our commitments to never forget the darkest times of Hungary, Hungary assumed the Chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) as of March this year. We will dedicate our Chairmanship to three main goals: the fight against Antisemitism, the promotion of Holocaust education and awareness-raising about the Roma genocide.

Mr President,

We are particularly concerned about the recent rise of barbaric attacks committed by terrorist groups against religious minorities, including Christians and minorities of other faiths. We cannot let this happen in the 21<sup>st</sup> century! We have to remind ourselves that Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights obliges us, the international community, to act concertedly and effectively in order to stop violence against religious communities.

Hungary is ready to play its part in this regard and we encourage other States to do the same. The Hungarian Government has offered financial support aimed at providing humanitarian assistance to displaced minorities in Northern Iraq, persecuted by ISIS. We also offered direct support to Egyptian Coptic families, whose family members were brutally killed by the same group in Libya.

As part of these efforts, Hungary has recently informed the Iraqi authorities that we stand ready to participate in any international effort to save and restore ancient cultural heritage destroyed in Iraq in the most barbaric fashion by ISIL.

Since there is no peace without justice, Hungary has repeatedly called for holding the perpetrators of these barbaric crimes committed against religious and other vulnerable groups accountable primarily through national or, if they are unavailable, through international accountability mechanisms.

Thank You, Mr President!