STATEMENT BY MR JANARDAN DWivedi, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT, ON THE AGENDA ITEMS OF GLOBAL AGENDA FOR DIALOGUE AMONG CIVILIZATIONS AND CULTURE OF PEACE AT THE UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY ON OCTOBER 18, 2010

Madam President,

I am deeply honoured and privileged to participate in today’s joint debate under the agenda items of Global Agenda for Dialogue among Civilizations and Culture of Peace.

As we celebrate in 2010 the International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World comes to an end, it provides us an opportunity to take a holistic view of the progress made so far and have an assessment of the challenges that lie ahead.
Please allow me to express our sincere thanks and appreciation to the Secretary General for his comprehensive reports on inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-civilizational dialogue and the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, 2001-2010.

Madam President,

In today’s world we are witnessing the rise of extremism and intolerance, outbreak of sectarian violence and increasing use of language of hatred and violence. These pose a serious challenge to the very foundations of our society.

The increasing interdependent and interconnected world has also, perhaps, accentuated the fault lines in our society. While there is an accelerated pace of economic and technological development, the same regrettably cannot be said with regard to ethical, moral and cultural development of our society. Indeed, our times have seen the rise of the scourge of terrorism.

The environment in which we live today is also accentuated by disparities, deprivation and exploitation. This is hardly conducive to laying the foundations of sustainable peace and development. Conscious of this stark reality, our former Prime Minister Shrimati Indira Gandhi had noted as early as in 1972 at the UN Conference on the Human Environment that poverty and need were the worst polluters. This stirred a global debate on the need to ensure that poverty eradication and developmental imperatives remained at the fore with environmental challenges in our pursuit of sustainable development.

Madam President,

Inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue is a necessity and one of the central elements in developing a better understanding of the apparent contradictions and divergent approaches that exist today in our societies.

We need to create an environment conducive for fostering dialogue between diverse cultures, races, faiths and religions that inculcates the values that promote transition from force to reason, from conflict and violence to dialogue and peace.

Dialogue amongst different cultures and religions is also important because it is precisely in the absence of such dialogue and understanding, that intolerance, bigotry and violence flourish.

This is the reason why extremist ideologies, violence and terrorism, have grown in a world in which we seem to be moving away from dialogue and understanding.
There can be no disputing that terrorism, which is a manifestation of extremism, intolerance and violence, is the antithesis of all religions. No religion condones violence or the killing of human beings. It is, therefore, imperative that the nations of the world must work together in a concerted manner to tackle the menace of terrorism and extremism, which are an anathema for modern societies.

Madam President,

All the great religions of the world essentially represent what the Indian ethos postulate as ‘Ekam sadviprah bahudha vadanti’ i.e. The Truth is One, the wise call it by many names.

Compassion, mercy and tolerance are the common values and beliefs among all major faiths of the world.

We must learn to live our faith with integrity while respecting and accepting each other.

Madam President,

India, the largest democracy in the world, a nation of unparalleled diversity with a population of over one billion, is the second most populous nation in the world.

While India, of course, has the largest Hindu population, we also have one of the largest Muslim populations in the world.

And, India provides a home to very significant number of practitioners of practically every other major religion of the world, be it Christianity, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Zoroastrianism or the Bahais. India is the birthplace of the Jainism. Gautam Buddha gave his first sermon in Sarnath, an eminent centre of Indian philosophy, after he attained enlightenment in Bodh Gaya.

The history of India, in essence, is a narrative of conversations between different civilizations and, indeed, conversation with the nature itself. India is home to scores of languages, hundreds of dialects, thousands of cuisines, a medley of races, colours, landscapes and cultures. This assimilation and accommodation of diversity has contributed to the richness of our composite culture and durability of our civilization.

Our civilizational legacy treats nature as a source of nurture and there is high value placed on living in harmony with nature. The Vedas are a repository for holistic development of the human-being in full harmony with its surroundings. The continuous strand of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" i.e. “the entire world is one family” has guided our constant interaction and exchange of thoughts with the outside world. The noble principles of life and spiritualism, including non-violence, have influenced successive generations of people worldwide.
The interaction between India and the West goes back to the time of ancient Greece. Millennia ago, the interaction between these two civilizations produced the exquisite Gandhara art form.

India's contact with Islam produced the beautiful confluence of the Indo-Islamic culture, which includes the great human values of Sufism.

Indeed, India would not have succeeded in holding together and strengthening a composite Indian identity unless Indians practiced tolerance and were determined to live together in peace.

The Father of our Nation, Mahatma Gandhi was the greatest apostle of peace and non-violence. We firmly believe that ‘Gandhi ateet hi nahi, bhavishya bhi hai’ i.e. ‘Gandhi is not the past, he is the future also’. He said, “I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible”. We believe that no culture or religion is superior to any other and have always benefited from our interactions with various civilizations throughout our history.

We, in India, Madam President, understand the importance of building alliances among religions, cultures and ethnic groups and we have always supported all efforts to build bridges of understanding between nations, peoples, religions, cultures across the world.

It is our considered view that successful pluralism must be grounded on the basic tenets of mutual understanding and respect for diverse traditions. This is also critical for harmonious development of all sections of the society, including gender equity and empowerment of women all over the world.

Madam President,

Global efforts towards peace and reconciliation can only succeed with a collective approach that is built on commitment, trust, dialogue and collaboration. We must do this, at all levels, within nations, within regions and within the broader international community.

The only way to achieve this goal is to move conceptually to a new dimension of dialogue and harmony among diverse cultures, races, faiths and religions so that all human beings could live in a sane and peaceful global society of our collective dreams.

Thank You.