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Intercultural dialogue is a must in ever more connected world, Ban says



2010, International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures

21 April 2010 – With the implosion of financial markets on Wall Street and the explosion of a volcano in Iceland highlighting in just two ways how the world is ever more interconnected, enhancing dialogue and understanding among peoples and faiths is more vital than ever, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today.

“It is the case whether the subject is melting icecaps in one part of the world or rising unemployment in another,” he told a ceremony at United Nations Headquarters in New York marking 2010 as the [International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures](#) in accordance with a General Assembly resolution passed in 2007.

“Like never before, global challenges have local impacts. Local events can have global impacts. This compels us to strengthen cooperation – expand the space for dialogue – and replace barriers of distrust with bridges of understanding.”

Mr. Ban stressed that this fundamental reality is also the *raison d’être* of the UN. “Quite simply, we are in this together,” he said. “Dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions is crucial to fulfilling the central objectives of the United Nations Charter, upholding human rights and advancing development.”

Greater cultural understanding can help provide the commitment, focus and cooperation required to achieve the Millennium Development Goals ([MDGs](#)), the ambitious targets set by the UN Summit of 2000 to slash a host of social ills by

2015, including extreme hunger and poverty, maternal and infant mortality and lack of access to education and health care, he said.

“Far too often, distrust and ignorance among cultures and faiths have been obstacles to peace and progress. So in a very real sense, promoting the rapprochement of cultures will promote the reaching of the MDGs,” he declared, citing strengthened education systems, increased exposure to information, and the commitment of local governments, civil society and the media as essential planks in the effort.

Mr. Ban noted that the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization ([UNESCO](#)), designated the world body’s lead agency for the Year, champions the promotion of cultural diversity and knowledge, while the Alliance of Civilizations, set up under UN auspices in 2005 at the initiative of Spain and Turkey, is striving to overcome prejudice among nations, cultures and religions.

Other UN agencies, funds and programmes are working to adapt activities to the cultural context in which they operate, while a recent Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) meeting on interfaith dialogue for peace and development in Manila, Philippines, highlighted efforts for intercultural conciliation.

“It is our common responsibility to ensure that our efforts reinforce each other and lead to a greater understanding and support for the rapprochement of cultures,” he concluded.

General Assembly President Ali Treki also stressed the need for high-quality education to produce future generations that wholeheartedly believe in tolerance and dialogue, and for practical and constructive measures to increase mutual understanding between peoples.

“Without a profound understanding of the histories, cultures and civilizations of the peoples of the world, extremism, discrimination and conflict will only increase,” he said. “This understanding must be firmly grounded in common human values, which are based on respect for differences.

“Labelling a specific culture or religion as being inherently violent or targeting the members of any culture or religion run counter to those values and are blatantly discriminatory actions that contravene States’ obligations under international human rights law.”

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