

UN adopts RP interfaith proposal

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MANILA, Philippines—The United Nations General Assembly has unanimously adopted a Philippine-initiated resolution calling on member-states to take steps to further promote inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, tolerance and understanding. In his report to the Department of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Hilario Davide, Philippine permanent representative to the United Nations in New York, said the adoption of the resolution capped the two-day UN meeting on interfaith cooperation for peace last week.

The resolution entitled "Promotion of Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace," tabled by the Philippines and Pakistan, was adopted by the General Assembly at the end of its plenary meeting.

Davide said the resolution was personally introduced by President Macapagal-Arroyo when the plenary session opened on Wednesday under Agenda Item 45: A Culture of Peace.

Participants included many world leaders, among them, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, King Abdullah II of Jordan, United States President George W. Bush, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown and Israeli President Shimon Peres.

At least 76 other member-states, including China, Japan and Russia, co-sponsored the resolution, up from the 56 that co-sponsored the resolution last year and the 24 that co-sponsored the original resolution in 2004.

Fifth try

It was the fifth resolution tabled by the Philippines and adopted by consensus by the General Assembly since 2004. "The 2008 resolution is specially significant because it formally took note for the first time of the four major interfaith initiatives of the Philippines, outside the ambit of the United Nations," Davide said.

He was referring to the ministerial meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace at the international level, and the Asia-Europe Interfaith Dialogue Forum and the Asia-Pacific Interfaith Dialogue for Peace and Harmony at the regional level.

"The resolution plants the seed for the eventual declaration of a United Nations Decade on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace from 2011 to 2020," Davide said. "It also encourages member-states to consider the idea of an enhanced process of dialogue among world religions."

Ambassador Leslie Gatan, Philippine deputy permanent representative, said these new elements "were obtained after hard-fought negotiations steered by diplomats at the Philippine Mission."

"The Philippine interfaith initiative was initially sponsored only by developing countries," Gatan said, adding that it took five years for other countries such as China, Japan and Russia to join its group of supporters.

The Philippines first drew the attention of the world body to issues concerning the role of the religious in secular affairs when it introduced the resolution in 2004.

Important dimensions

The resolution affirms that mutual understanding and inter-religious dialogue constitute important dimensions of the culture of peace. It lauds the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as integral to building tolerant societies and durable peace.

It also reaffirms the solemn commitment of the United Nations to promote universal respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, in line with the United Nations Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The resolution likewise encourages the promotion of dialogue among media from all cultures. It calls on member-states to consider initiatives that identify practical actions in all levels of society for promoting inter-religious and intercultural dialogue, tolerance and understanding.

It mandates preparations for the 2010 International Year for Rapprochement of Cultures with interfaith dialogue at its core, under the leadership of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Co-sponsors

The co-sponsors of this year's resolution were Afghanistan, Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Azerbaijan, Bahamas, Bangladesh, Belize, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burma (Myanmar), Cambodia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comoros, Congo, Djibouti, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Guatemala, Guinea, Haiti, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Mongolia, Montenegro, Morocco, Nepal, Nicaragua, Oman, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Qatar, Russia, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Suriname, Swaziland, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Yemen, Bosnia and Herzegovina, China, Brazil, Egypt, Ethiopia, Grenada, Honduras, Iran, Iraq, Japan, Macedonia, Peru, Seychelles, Trinidad and Tobago, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Mali, Paraguay, Democratic Republic of the Congo and Tunisia.