



General Assembly

Seventy-sixth session

44th plenary meeting
Monday, 6 December 2021, 10 a.m.
New York

Official Records

President: Mr. Shahid (Maldives)

The meeting was called to order at 10 a.m.

Agenda item 3 (continued)

Credentials of representatives to the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly

(b) Report of the Credentials Committee (A/76/550)

The President: The Assembly has before it a draft resolution entitled “Credentials of representatives to the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly”, recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 15 of its report.

I now give the floor to the Chair of the Credentials Committee, Ms. Anna Karin Eneström of Sweden.

Ms. Eneström (Sweden): On behalf of the Credentials Committee, I have the honour to introduce its report concerning the credentials of the representatives to the General Assembly at its seventy-sixth session, as contained in document A/76/550.

The Committee had before it two communications concerning the representation of Myanmar to the seventy-sixth session that indicated different individuals as representatives and two communications concerning the representation of Afghanistan to the seventy-sixth session that indicated different individuals as representatives. The Committee deferred its decision on the credentials pertaining to the representatives of Myanmar and the credentials pertaining to the representatives of Afghanistan to the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly.

Having considered the credentials of representatives of other Member States to the seventy-sixth session at its meeting on 1 December, the Credentials Committee adopted without a vote a draft resolution accepting those credentials. The Committee also recommended to the General Assembly the adoption of a draft resolution concerning the credentials of representatives to the seventy-sixth session, as contained in paragraph 15 of its report.

I would like to note that, since the days of the meeting of the Credentials Committee, formal credentials in the format required by rule 27 of the rules of procedure were received by the Secretary of the Credentials Committee regarding Italy and Ukraine.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to the members of the Committee and to the Secretariat for facilitating our work.

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on the draft resolution entitled “Credentials of representatives to the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly”, recommended by the Credentials Committee in paragraph 15 of its report.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

The draft resolution was adopted (resolution 76/15).

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of position after adoption, may I remind delegations that explanations are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

This record contains the text of speeches delivered in English and of the translation of speeches delivered in other languages. Corrections should be submitted to the original languages only. They should be incorporated in a copy of the record and sent under the signature of a member of the delegation concerned to the Chief of the Verbatim Reporting Service, room U-0506 (verbatimrecords@un.org). Corrected records will be reissued electronically on the Official Document System of the United Nations (<http://documents.un.org>).



Mr. Fernandez De Soto Valderrama (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): I take the floor on behalf of the delegations of Australia, Brazil, Canada, Ecuador, El Salvador, Georgia, Guatemala, Honduras, Israel, the Marshall Islands, Paraguay, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, the United States of America and my country, Colombia, for the purpose of noting in the official record that the approval of the report of the Credentials Committee (A/76/550) at the seventy-sixth session of the General Assembly should not be interpreted as tacit recognition by our countries of Nicolás Maduro Moros or his designated representatives to the General Assembly.

Mr. Ghadirkhomi (Islamic Republic of Iran): My delegation welcomes the work of the Credentials Committee and thanks its Chair, the Permanent Representative of Sweden, Ms. Anna Karin Eneström, for the report of the Committee (A/76/550).

My delegation joined the consensus on resolution 76/15, recommended by the Committee; however, I would like to express my delegation's reservations about the part of the report and the resolution that could be construed as recognition of the Israeli regime.

Mr. Moncada (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): We thank the General Assembly for having accepted the credentials of our delegation as the sole and legitimate representatives of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. That decision is a recognition of the sovereign will of our people to elect their leaders in peace, as well as our inalienable right to self-determination and national independence.

Once again, the Government of the United States of America and its allies have failed in their interventionist policy against the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela by dissociating themselves from the adoption of resolution 76/15, which was approved by the Credentials Committee, solely with regard to the credentials of the constitutionally and democratically elected Government of President Nicolás Maduro Moros.

The decision of the Government of the United States of America and its allies to instrumentalize the General Assembly to promote its policy of regime change, even exerting pressure on other delegations to join it in that venture, shows the persistent contempt of that Government for the purposes and principles contained in Articles 1 and 2 of the Charter of the United Nations and its intention to turn the Organization into a weapon of intervention to promote coups d'état against

the legitimate authorities of any State Member of the United Nations.

There is no rule in international law that allows the Government of the United States of America and its allies to intervene in the internal affairs of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, or any other country, while ignoring the sovereignty of its people and the authority of its legitimate representatives. Neither does it have the legal authority to become the arbiter of the political systems of the States Members of the United Nations, or indeed of democracies worldwide. In that sense, its behaviour as a supposed universal decision-maker in the electoral processes of sovereign States demonstrates its persistent non-compliance with its international obligations and its intention to destabilize political systems around the world.

The Charter of the United Nations does not allow the instrumentalization of the General Assembly to ignore the authorities of its members or to impose selective criteria about democracy. The United States of America and its allies are not the measure of the world. When referring to relations between States and the question of democracy, there is no normative order other than that of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. An alleged order based on rules not agreed by all States and in which the United States of America and its allies impose their rules of conduct is a violation of the Charter of the Organization. The United States cannot nationalize the rest of the world.

Finally, we thank Member States for accepting our credentials, rejecting the colonial aggression against our country and recognizing the will of our people. Venezuela is, and will always be, free, independent and sovereign.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in explanation of position.

I call on the representative of Israel on a point of order.

Mrs. Weiss (Israel): It is unfortunate that I have to take the floor. I raised my hand to take the floor after the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran. We strongly object to the statement made by Iran. We are a member, like every other member, of this forum, and we expect equal treatment and respect — and nothing less than that. In its statement, the Iranian Government referred to us as a regime, and that is not our proper name. A number of

States have made that objection in the past. We deserve to be called by our proper name, and we expect that. We would like it to be stated for the record that we were called an improper name, and we expect our proper name to be used in this forum.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of sub-item (b) of agenda item 3 and of agenda item 3 as a whole?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 10

Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin

Report of the Secretary-General (A/76/321)

Draft resolution (A/76/L.17)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Greece to introduce draft resolution A/76/L.17.

Mrs. Theofili (Greece): I feel extremely honoured that my country, Greece, is introducing draft resolution A/76/L.17, entitled “Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin”. We hope that today the General Assembly will adopt this important draft resolution by consensus, as was the case in previous years.

I would like to thank both the Secretary-General and the Director-General of UNESCO for their comprehensive report (A/76/321) on the return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin, which outlines the most significant developments that have taken place on the subject since 2018.

In the very recent past, cultural property has been more targeted than ever before, in the light of the unprecedented attacks against it in the course of the armed conflicts in the Middle East and elsewhere. One of the consequences of those conflicts is indeed the looting of antiquities and their illicit trafficking and trade. The fight against illicit trafficking in cultural property is therefore a key element in the strategy for eliminating the sources of any illicit profit-making, including the financing of terrorism.

The draft resolution before the General Assembly today expresses deep concern about the loss, destruction, theft, pillage, illicit removal or misappropriation of

cultural property from archaeological and other sites, in particular in areas of armed conflict, while at the same time recalling relevant Security Council resolutions, in particular resolutions 2199 (2015), 2253 (2015), 2322 (2016) and 2368 (2017), which highlight, among other things, the direct linkage between illicit trafficking in cultural property and terrorism financing.

The draft resolution also recalls Security Council resolution 2347 (2017), which focuses exclusively on the targeted destruction of cultural heritage in the context of armed conflicts, as well as on protection against looting and trafficking, notably by terrorist groups.

Furthermore, the draft resolution recognizes the leading role of UNESCO in the fight against illicit trafficking in cultural property and reaffirms the importance of the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

As highlighted in the report, the issue of the return of, or restitution for, cultural property has gained unprecedented visibility since 2018. That is a significant development because one of the main aims of the draft resolution, as made apparent by its title, is the return of, or restitution for, cultural property that is of fundamental spiritual, historical and cultural value to the countries of origin.

In that context, all Member States are called on to cooperate and take appropriate measures to ensure that all actors involved in the trade in cultural property, including, but not limited to, auction houses, art dealers, art collectors, museum professionals and managers of online marketplaces, provide verifiable documentation of provenance and export certificates, as applicable, related to any cultural property that is imported, exported or offered for sale, including via the Internet.

Capacity-building is equally critical for the success of the efforts undertaken with regard to the return of, or restitution for, cultural property to the countries of origin. Criminal prosecution and customs and border controls are indispensable as are preventive measures, including an appropriate framework for restitution.

In that context, the draft resolution underlines the critical role of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, UNESCO and INTERPOL, while at the same time focusing on the added value of the stolen works of art databases provided by the respective international organizations as a tool in the fight against illicit

trafficking in cultural property, of which all Member States should make use of.

The international community shares a common responsibility to protect cultural heritage, whether tangible or intangible and in times of both peace and war. Cultural property is not simply a testimony of a nation's path but also the reflection of its history and heritage. Therefore, nations must be protected against the loss, destruction, theft, pillage, illicit removal or misappropriation of such property, which must be restored to the historic national environment in which it can best inspire the collective conscience of humankind. That is precisely why the objectives of the draft resolution should leave no State indifferent.

We would therefore like to invite all Member States to co-sponsor the draft resolution, and we thank States once again for their support.

Ms. Hassan (Egypt): Egypt would like to sincerely thank the delegation of Greece for introducing this important draft resolution (A/76/L.17) and for its efforts in facilitating the consultations. Egypt joined the list of main sponsors of the draft resolution in order to support its cause. Egypt is one of the countries that is most keen to protect cultural property, being prone to such crimes since time immemorial.

Egypt stresses the importance of recovering all stolen cultural property and requests the United Nations to effectively contribute to achieving the goal set out in Agenda 2063 of the African Union related to the restoration of all cultural property. Egypt hopes that the draft resolution, once adopted, and other processes will increase the effectiveness of the implementation of the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.

In conclusion, Egypt welcomes the adoption by UNESCO last year of the resolution entitled "Global Priority Africa", which supports the efforts of African countries to restore their stolen cultural property. Egypt will continue to take all the necessary measures at the national and international levels to conserve and preserve its cultural heritage.

Mr. Takht Ravanchi (Islamic Republic of Iran): Allow me to express my appreciation to the Secretary-General and the Director-General of UNESCO for the report contained in document A/76/321. I also wish to commend the Government of Greece for its

able leadership in facilitating consultations on draft resolution A/76/L.17, entitled "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin", of which Iran is also a co-sponsor. My delegation would also like to take this opportunity to re-emphasize the prominent role of UNESCO in the fight against the illicit trafficking in cultural property and encourage the reinforcement of its efforts for the return of, or restitution for, cultural objects to the countries of origin.

Cultural property, while truly considered the common heritage of humankind, contribute to shaping the cultural and national identity of countries of origin and are a testament to their civilizations, values and cultures. Ownership of cultural property is an inalienable human right of the people of their soil. Consequently, the international community shares a common responsibility as well as a legal and ethical obligation to not only preserve and protect cultural property but also secure its return to the countries of origin.

The removal of cultural property from their countries of origin by whatever means, forms or justifications, based on the general principles of international law, natural law, conscience or human values, is unacceptable and illegal. Therefore, the obligation to return cultural property to countries of origin neither necessarily emanates from international legally binding instruments nor is limited to their State parties.

In the same vein, the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property neither legitimizes any removal of cultural property from its countries of origin before the entry into force of that Convention nor exonerates any States, including its parties, from the obligation to reconstitute for or return the cultural objects stolen or illegally exported before the entry into force of the Convention to the countries of origin.

However, my delegation believes that, since its entry into force, the 1970 Convention needs to be reconsidered in line with the relevant developments, including the articulation of the non-retroactive application of the Convention, as well as the recognition of the possession of cultural property by the people of their soil following its removal from the countries of origin by archaeological, ethnological or natural science missions.

Such removals took place during a period of international relations when most of the countries of origin were under colonial domination and the political influence of foreign Powers — and for various reasons, including the lack of development and access to knowledge — and were not aware of the great value of their cultural property. Furthermore, cultural property should not be subjected to any confiscation or law enforcement action or unilateral coercive measures, as they are a common heritage of humankind.

The illegal international cross-border movement of cultural objects remains an ever-increasing concern for countries of origin, including my country. As the Secretary-General indicates in his report, “threats to movable cultural heritage have continued to increase and have taken new forms” (A/76/321, *para.* 56). In addition to the traditional main catastrophic causes leading to the illicit trafficking in cultural property, such as conflicts, occupation and foreign intervention, trafficking and trade through illegal markets by terrorist groups with the aim of financing terrorism has emerged as one of the main vehicles for the trafficking in cultural property that has proliferated in recent years, especially after the creation of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, also known as Da’esh, and Al-Qaida.

My delegation expresses its satisfaction with the inclusion in the draft resolution before us today of a proposal to counter the financing of terrorism through the illicit trafficking in cultural property and the obligations of States to return those items to the countries of origin, as indicated in the seventh review of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

In that regard, we also wish to alert the international community to the illegal excavations and threats facing the cultural heritage in Palestine, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque, by the occupying regime of Israel and its attempts to destroy and change its functions. While that act constitutes a flagrant violation of international law, it will also lead to the escalation of the already volatile situation in the Middle East, which is itself the result of the prolonged occupation of Palestine.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is of the view that only through international cooperation can we combat the illicit trafficking in cultural property and ensure restitution or its return to the countries of origin. In that context, our proposal on the establishment of a joint action plan by countries of the Ancient Civilizations Forum, as well as countries of origin that are victims

of the illicit trafficking in cultural property, will help coordinate and consolidate efforts to combat the illicit trafficking in cultural objects and their return, or restitution for, to the countries of origin.

Finally, given the important role that cultural heritage plays in the dialogue and peaceful co-existence among nations, the Islamic Republic of Iran expresses its readiness to promote the culture of peace through cooperation with, and the extension of, its technical assistance to other countries, especially those that host the ancient Iranian civilization and cultural heritage.

Mr. Ke (Cambodia): At the outset, my delegation would like to commend the delegation of Greece for its efforts in facilitating draft resolution A/76/L.17, entitled “Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin”. We welcome the Secretary-General’s comprehensive report on this important matter (A/76/321). Cambodia is pleased to co-sponsor the draft resolution.

As far as the illicit trafficking in cultural property from its country of origin is concerned, Cambodia urges all Member States to fully implement the draft resolution once adopted, as well as other relevant resolutions. All appropriated cultural property must be returned to the countries of origin for the sake of dignity, mutual understanding and respect. All relevant stakeholders should make greater efforts to cease trading in cultural property. That is the key that will prevent the ultimate separation of cultural property from its origins.

Cambodia has maintained a deep-rooted cultural identity in South-East Asia for centuries until the present time. However, over several decades of civil war, Cambodia experienced the loss of cultural property to other countries, including into private collections. We encourage museums and private collectors with Khmer cultural property to repatriate Cambodian treasures back to their homeland. Cambodia will continue to gather extensive evidence and provenance to document the looting of our treasures and improper possession by others.

We appreciate the efforts and collaboration of the Government of the United States of America for the return to Cambodia of our cultural property from the Denver Art Museum and other locations. That partnership has opened up an opportunity for the return of the souls of our Khmer ancestors, which were removed from their motherland during war and conflict. Cambodia will continue to work closely with

the United States Government for the return of other important works of art to Cambodia and welcomes similar invaluable gestures from other countries in the future.

We commend UNESCO's work and can measure with pride the distance covered by that organization. UNESCO has been able to evolve and embrace all issues and meet all challenges by offering global cohesion. We firmly believe that the invaluable cooperation between Cambodia and UNESCO will further enhance assistance to restore Cambodian cultural heritage and identity and ensure that Khmer antiquities are repatriated, to be enjoyed and cherished by Cambodians and international visitors alike. The recent presence in Paris on 12 November of His Majesty Preah Bat Samdech Preah Boromneath Norodom Sihamoni, King of Cambodia, during the forty-first General Conference of UNESCO, is the best testimony to the unwavering commitment of the Cambodian people to that irreplaceable organization.

In conclusion, Cambodia has reaffirmed its commitment to the implementation of relevant resolutions, as well as its commitment to promote cooperation with all parties concerned in order to cease all forms of illicit trafficking in cultural property and fully cooperate in the restitution of all cultural property to the respective countries of origin.

Mr. Hadjichrysanthou (Cyprus): The protection of cultural property has long been a priority for Cyprus, given its rich historical, cultural and religious heritage, as well as the loss of a very significant amount of our cultural property since well before our independence.

At the outset, I wish to express our sincere appreciation to the delegation of Greece for once again introducing draft resolution A/76/L.17, on the return of, or restitution for, cultural property to the countries of origin, which we have traditionally co-sponsored.

The pillaging of, and illicit trafficking in, cultural property has always had far-reaching proportions. What we now witness, however, despite our significant advances in the normative framework for the protection of cultural property, is the deliberate destruction of unique monuments of global historical and cultural significance. As an international community, we have proven unsuccessful in stopping that, just as we have proven ineffective in preventing the unacceptable, arbitrary alteration of the status of ecumenical cultural and religious landmarks.

While such actions culminate in uprooting the cultural and ethnological connection of the local populations from their lands, they are not only directed against the people of the country where they are perpetrated but also against our shared history and the cultural identity of humankind as a whole.

Much like trafficking in arms or drugs, the illicit trafficking in cultural property now constitutes a global industry. The growing dimensions of that crime compel us to redouble our efforts to combat it, both within and between States, both in armed conflicts and in times of peace. Whether or not we succeed in better protecting cultural property depends on wide-reaching changes in attitudes.

Illicit trafficking in cultural property is a crime against all of us, not just the specific civilization or country whose heritage is vandalized. The effective implementation of the international legal framework is a *sine qua non* for the success of our efforts. The draft resolution before us today is a positive step in that direction, as it contributes to bridging the gap between legislation and cooperation at the domestic and the international levels.

As a long-time victim of the pillage and theft of incredibly large numbers of artefacts of historical, archaeological and religious significance, Cyprus has been struggling for many years to trace and repatriate its cultural property. In the past four decades alone, more than 60,000 cultural and religious objects of immense historical value have been looted from Cyprus' occupied areas and sold in black markets all over the world. Under international law, the responsibility for their return rests with the occupying Power. While we remain dedicated to locating and repatriating our stolen treasures, that is not a battle we can fight alone, and we continue to rely on the efforts of other States and on robust international cooperation.

As a result of our experiences, Cyprus has always sought to contribute effectively to international efforts to combat illicit trafficking and ensure the repatriation of cultural property. For that reason, Cyprus took the lead in concluding the Nicosia Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property, a unique universal mechanism to protect the common cultural heritage of humankind and the only international treaty aiming to prevent and combat cultural property crimes by providing for their criminalization. The Nicosia Convention can be instrumental in international efforts

to address legal gaps with regard to the prevention and prosecution of trafficking in cultural property. We invite all Member States to consider acceding to the Convention.

At the same time, we welcome other significant developments in the international arena. I refer to Security Council resolution 2347 (2017), adopted unanimously in March 2017, which was a historic milestone in the international efforts to protect cultural heritage. We would have liked to have seen additional work by the Council, following up and building on that important resolution.

It is important for the Council to be consistent, even if the members that championed an issue are no longer serving on the Council. Equally important is the emergence of relevant case law. The landmark decision of the International Criminal Court in the case *The Prosecutor v. Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi* in 2016 paves the way for more efficient enforcement of international justice with respect to cultural heritage crimes. Bringing such cases to justice serves to enhance public awareness on the seriousness of international cultural heritage crimes.

The protection of cultural heritage is an obligation that touches on many areas of our work at the United Nations: peace and security, sustainable development and human rights. The destruction of cultural heritage and the illicit trafficking in cultural property not only impair the preservation of collective history and the safeguarding of cultural identity but also hinder the realization of economic, political and social rights and the development of a global civic society. We need a more integrated approach through the establishment of multilevel mechanisms on a local, regional and global scale, leading to a system of global governance for the protection and enjoyment of cultural heritage.

Mr. Al Khalil (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to thank the permanent delegation of Greece for introducing the important draft resolution contained in document A/76/L.17, entitled "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin". My country has joined the list of countries co-sponsoring the draft resolution as we believe in its importance and relevance to the threat faced by our cultural heritage.

The attacks on cultural property experienced in a number of Middle Eastern countries, particularly in Syria, Iraq and occupied Palestine, constitute stark

examples of the systematic targeting of international cultural heritage and common human values. Over the past 10 years, my country, which is known for its civilization, cultural heritage and rich history, has faced a savage terrorist campaign targeting humans and sites.

Terrorist organizations, proxy militias and their sponsors have targeted public and private property as well as infrastructure and service facilities. Historic areas listed by UNESCO as World Heritage Sites have not been spared. Those groups have wreaked havoc, destroying cultural sites while financing their terrorist activities through trafficking illegally in archaeological monuments. They have sometimes destroyed such monuments under the influence of extremist thoughts or distorted explanations of religious interpretations.

Everyone saw the terrorists of the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant/Da'esh destroying the historic Arch of Triumph and the Temple of Baalshamin in Palmyra, in addition to booby-trapping its amphitheatre. The Da'esh and Al-Nusra Front terrorists targeted the monasteries of Maaloula, the Great Umayyad Mosque in Aleppo and Khalid Bin Al-Walid Mosque in Homs. They targeted Syrian archaeologists such as the late Khaled Al-Asaad. They exhumed the graves of historical figures, philosophers, scientists and clergymen.

It is sad to see all those crimes being committed while many Western countries remain silent and impede any action to support Syria in the preservation of its heritage and the restitution of its looted monuments.

The result of the sponsorship by some countries of terrorist organizations, including by sending foreign terrorist fighters to them, is that the border areas that are out of control of the Syrian State have become a corridor for smuggling artefacts and other looted material, such as oil, agricultural crops and properties, which are transferred to Europe and other countries with the complicity and facilitation of Turkey and its forces present illegally on the territories of my country.

The Turkish forces have themselves excavated and plundered many monument sites and mounds in areas they occupy in the north and north-west of my country. They have looted archaeological monuments and smuggled them into Turkish territory, and then into black markets in Europe and the United States through organized crime networks. Such practices include plundering and destroying historical sites and mounds in the Afrin area during the search for historical treasures and burials; excavations at the Prophet Hori

site, Tal Zrafkeh and Brad, as well as many other historical locations; and destroying scores of other historical sites and mounds, including Tal Obeidan, Arab Sheikho, Deir Sawwan, Jandarees village, Tal Ain Dara, Tal Esteer, Ain Hajar and Kafroun.

In that connection, my country expresses its great concern at the failure on the part of the international community to address the phenomenon of illegal trafficking in cultural property and ensure that it is not used to finance terrorism. We call for an end to the disregard by some members of the Organization of their international obligations, including Security Council resolution 2199 (2015), and we call for those countries that sponsor terrorism to be held accountable for their crimes of looting cultural property.

My country's delegation stresses the need for Member States to make every effort to return stolen Syrian cultural property to its original place in Syria. In that context, we call on those countries to follow the example of cooperation between the Syrian Government represented by the cooperation between its Permanent Mission in Geneva and the Swiss authorities, which led to the signing of an agreement a few days ago to return three monuments stolen from one of the historical sites in Palmyra registered by UNESCO in 1980 as a World Heritage Site.

In conclusion, my country's delegation stresses the importance of Member States complying with the provisions of draft resolution A/76/L.17, which emphasizes the urgent need to address the threat of terrorism against global heritage and the importance of international cooperation and coordination with the affected countries and UNESCO to deal with the threats against our global heritage, particularly as a result of terrorist attacks.

We stress once again our full right to the return of all looted cultural property, in accordance with the UNESCO 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property and the 1995 Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects of the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/76/L.17, entitled "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin".

I give the floor to the representative of the Secretariat.

Mr. Nakano (Department for General Assembly and Conference Management): I should like to announce that, since the submission of draft resolution A/76/L.17 and in addition to those delegations listed in the document, the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/76/L.17: Afghanistan, Albania, Algeria, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belize, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Bulgaria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Canada, the Central African Republic, China, Costa Rica, Côte d'Ivoire, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Djibouti, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Fiji, Finland, the Gambia, Georgia, Guatemala, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Hungary, Iceland, Indonesia, Ireland, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Italy, Jordan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Latvia, Lebanon, Lesotho, Libya, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Mali, Malta, the Marshall Islands, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mexico, Montenegro, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nepal, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, Nigeria, North Macedonia, Norway, Panama, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, the Republic of Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Rwanda, San Marino, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Sudan, Spain, Sri Lanka, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Thailand, Togo, Tunisia, Turkey, Tuvalu, Ukraine, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Yemen and Zimbabwe.

The President: May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/76/L.17?

Draft resolution A/76/L.17 was adopted (resolution 76/16).

The President: Before giving the floor to speakers in explanation of position on resolution 76/16, may I remind delegations that explanations are limited to 10 minutes and should be made by delegations from their seats.

I now give the floor to the representative of the United States.

Ms. Eyrich (United States of America): The United States would like to thank the delegation of Greece for its able facilitation of resolution 76/16.

The United States welcomes resolutions at the General Assembly and other international forums that draw attention to the important issue of trafficking in cultural property. We believe strongly that the protection of cultural heritage in countries of origin is not only the right thing to do for moral reasons, but it also helps promote regional stability and good governance.

We also encourage States to modernize their efforts to disrupt cultural property trafficking by taking into account the rights of indigenous peoples to the use and control of their ceremonial objects and to the repatriation of their human remains and by working to enable access to and/or the repatriation of human remains and ceremonial objects that have been trafficked, consistent with the aspirations of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The President: We have heard the only speaker in explanation of position on resolution 76/16.

Before calling on representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply, may I remind members that statements in the exercise of the right of reply are limited to 10 minutes for the first intervention and to five minutes for the second and should be made by delegations from their seats.

Mrs. Weiss (Israel): Israel joined the consensus on this important resolution (resolution 76/16) but finds it unfortunate that the Islamic Republic of Iran, and then Syria, decided to sidetrack this debate for the purposes of politicization.

First, Israel wishes to state again for the record that we object to the reference to our State as a so-called regime and expect to be addressed in this forum and throughout the United Nations system by our proper formal name, as required under the Charter of the United Nations for all Member States. We expect no less than respect and equal treatment.

Secondly, it is ironic that in its statement Iran first ignored the reality on the ground in Jerusalem, where all religious faiths have access to the holy sites — something that was certainly not the case before our holy capital was reunified. Moreover, apropos the recognition of the value of cultural property, it is ironic that Iran denied in its statement, as others have recently done in this

very Hall, the Jewish people's deep and long-standing historic ties to Jerusalem and the holy sites.

Indeed, Iran failed to mention Har Habayit, which is the Jewish name of the Temple Mount. Har Habayit is in Jerusalem, and it is Judaism's holy site. We pray to that beacon of our cultural heritage three times a day. Israel recognizes the significance of Jerusalem and its holy sites to all three Abrahamic faiths. We would hope that other States would do the same, particularly as we discuss the importance of cultural property, a principle that Israel certainly respects and to which it adheres.

Mrs. Inanç Örnekol (Turkey): I am obliged to take the floor in reply to the statements of representatives who raised baseless allegations against my country.

However, allow me to begin by expressing our appreciation to the delegation of Greece for introducing and facilitating resolution 76/16, entitled "Return or restitution of cultural property to the countries of origin". Turkey is pleased to have once again co-sponsored this important resolution.

The illicit trade in cultural property continues to be a source of grave concern. Despite the awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts to address the challenge, threats to cultural heritage have been increasing and have taken on new forms. Removing artefacts from their natural and historical context is a crime committed against humankind. Cultural properties that have survived thousands of years from past civilizations and been entrusted to our care continue the common history of humankind.

Situations of conflict or instability further aggravate the risk of destruction or illicit trafficking in cultural heritage. The actions of terrorist organizations, such as the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, also known as Da'esh, have set an unfortunate example of that. We strongly condemn the brutal obliteration of archaeological sites, museums, places of worship and other religious places, in addition to books and manuscripts, which are irreplaceable treasures of humankind.

In the face of those unfortunate developments, Turkey has reinforced all necessary measures to prevent the illegal transfer of historical artefacts from their country of origin. Among other precautions, Turkey regularly conducts import-control operations along its south and south-east borders in order to prevent the smuggling of cultural property. Moreover,

in close collaboration with UNESCO, INTERPOL and the World Customs Organization, all governorships in both State-run and private museums and collectors are reminded on a daily basis of the risk of illicit trafficking of goods from neighbouring countries.

In that context, the implementation of Security Council resolution 2199 (2015), of which Turkey is a co-sponsor, is being meticulously observed. Against that background, we categorically deny the unfounded allegations of the representative of the Syrian regime, which lost its legitimacy long ago. I would like to say that those are desperate attempts to divert attention from the enormous destruction the regime continues to inflict on its own people — and nothing more. Coming from a regime that has massacred and tortured the Syrian people before the eyes of the international community for more than a decade, the allegations have no credibility, and we refute them in their entirety.

As for the baseless allegations related to Turkey made by the Greek Cypriot representative, those comments are devoid of value or meaning as far as Turkey is concerned. Regarding the issues they raised concerning the island, that delegation should be responded to by their counterpart, namely, the Turkish Cypriot side, whose voice unfortunately cannot be heard in this Hall due to the occupation of their seats by the Greek Cypriot Administration since 1963.

Mr. Ghorbanpour Najafabadi (Islamic Republic of Iran): I wish to exercise my right of reply with regard to what was said about my delegation earlier. I would like to inform the General Assembly of the illegal excavations and threats faced by the cultural heritage of Palestine, especially the Al-Aqsa Mosque.

I would like to emphasize that it is not just Al-Aqsa Mosque; there are other sites. In particular, the threat to the Al-Aqsa Mosque by the occupying regime of the Palestinian territories is a fact that has been recognized in various reports submitted to the Assembly. I would like to once again alert the international community to the continuation of that policy, which will definitely endanger international peace and security. It is the responsibility of all States to prevent that malicious policy and behaviour.

Mr. Al Khalil (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): We say very clearly — and I use her official title, in line with the rules and procedures of the United Nations and in the presence of the President of the General Assembly — that the representative of Turkey

does not have the right to speak in the name of the Syrian people. The Syrian Government is the only one to speak in the name of its people, while neither Turkey, nor its leader, nor its President have the right to speak in the name of the Syrian people.

Everyone in this Hall knows from United Nations reports, including from a report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team of the Security Council, that thousands of foreign terrorist fighters have come to my country, Syria, and not by parachutes or spaceships but most of the time over the Turkish-Syrian border under Turkish supervision. The Turkish intelligence service facilitated the entry of those foreign terrorist fighters to Syria.

Of course, when we talk about support for terrorism and investing in it, Turkey, with its President and Government, is undoubtedly one of the main sponsors of terrorists in Syria and the region. As noted previously, Turkey facilitated the entry into Syria of tens of thousands of foreign terrorists. Turkey still provides all kinds of support to the Al-Nusra Front and its affiliates of terrorist organizations, which have killed Syrians. Along with forced displacement, Turkey also adopts a policy of making everything Turkish in the territories that it occupies in Syria.

The list of violations committed by Turkey is a long one, but I will not elaborate.

Ms. Panteli (Cyprus): I take the floor to respond to the statement by the representative of Turkey. I have to stress the importance of according the proper respect to all Member States in this Hall and addressing them by their proper names. The Republic of Cyprus is the only recognized State on the island under international law, and the international community has no doubts about that.

With regard to the protection of cultural property in Cyprus, I note that Turkey has not denied the fact that, due to its occupation, the cultural property of Cyprus has been looted and sold abroad. There is actually substantial case law in courts all over the world that reflects our efforts to repatriate the stolen cultural property of Cyprus.

Despite the bicomunal efforts on the island to restore destroyed monuments, the damage is extensive, and the vast majority of invaluable articles of movable cultural property remains to be recovered.

Mrs. Inanç Örnekol (Turkey): As to the hallucinatory statement made by the representative of the Syrian regime, I will repeat: I do not consider him as my legitimate counterpart. His comments here are an affront to the millions of Syrians who have suffered countless crimes at the hands of the regime. Therefore, we will not honour his delusional accusations with a response.

Mr. Al Khalil (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): The representative of Turkey insists on referring to us as the representatives of a regime. That does not concern me, because I comply with the rules and procedures of the United Nations.

First, she said that we were not her counterpart. I partly agree with her that we are not on an equal footing. I represent a Government that fights terrorism, whereas she represents a Government that sponsors and supports terrorism. I therefore partly agree with her that we are not equals.

Secondly, we do not seek recognition from a terrorist and criminal Government. Our legitimacy comes from the Charter of the United Nations and the United Nations.

It appears that the representative of Turkey wants us to continue to mention the crimes committed by her Government, as represented by President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. Turkey has adopted a policy of collective punishment against 2 million civilians in the city of Al-Hasakah, along with scores of neighbouring villages, because they reject the Turkish occupation.

Turkey deliberately and repeatedly cuts off the water supply of those people. The Turkish occupation forces and their proxies in terrorist organizations have suspended the pumping of water from the Allouk water station and its water wells more than 20 times and for different periods of time. That caused suffering to our people in Al-Hasakah and health risks linked to the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic. I would like to remind those present that such behaviour follows the same criminal approach adopted by the terrorists who cut off the water supply of millions of civilians in Damascus in 2017.

The President: May I take it that it is the wish of the General Assembly to conclude its consideration of agenda item 10?

It was so decided.

Agenda item 16

Culture of peace

Report of the Secretary-General (A/76/357)

Draft resolutions (A/76/L.19 and A/76/L.21)

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Bangladesh to introduce draft resolution A/76/L.19.

Ms. Fatima (Bangladesh): On behalf of 91 co-sponsors and counting, I have the honour to introduce the flagship draft resolution entitled “Follow-up to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace” (A/76/L.19).

The adoption of the draft resolution this year assumes greater relevance and urgency as we continue to grapple with the unprecedented, multifaceted challenges brought on by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. This year, in addition to technical updates we have also included three new paragraphs — the thirteenth and thirty-first preambular paragraphs and paragraph 11 — to reflect COVID-19-era realities and other important developments.

First, those additions include a recognition of the rising inequalities in income, opportunities, access to information and communications technologies, health coverage and social protection, as well as new challenges in health-care services and vaccines, deepening gender inequality and a surge in hate speech, stigmatization, racism and xenophobia, which all stand to threaten peace.

Secondly, the draft resolution takes note of the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech, which calls for partnerships with new and traditional media to promote the values of tolerance, non-discrimination, pluralism and freedom of opinion and expression, as well as to address hate speech narratives.

Finally, the new paragraph 11 calls upon States to promote the values of a culture of peace for an inclusive, resilient and sustainable recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

We sincerely thank all delegations for their active and constructive participation in this year’s informal consultations on the draft resolution. We deeply appreciate the spirit of flexibility shown by all and the

valuable inputs, which have certainly enriched the draft resolution before us.

The draft resolution welcomes the convening by the President of the General Assembly on 7 September of the High-level Forum on the Culture of Peace, on the theme “Transformative role of the culture of peace: promoting resilience and inclusion in post-COVID recovery”, which saw rich participation by Member States, civil society and other stakeholders. In keeping with tradition, the draft resolution requests the President of the General Assembly to convene the annual High-level Forum on the Culture of Peace in September 2022. We look forward to working closely with the Office of the President of the General Assembly to make next year’s event yet another success.

The initiative on the culture of peace, which began in 1999 as a modest venture, has over time and with the mandate of the Assembly grown in relevance and evolved into a dominant theme, finding larger footprints and recognition in all major United Nations discourse. In the rapidly changing global situation, it has proved to be a useful means to complement the obligations of the Charter of the United Nations for maintaining peace in the world.

For the past 21 years, the General Assembly has endorsed the enduring value of a culture of peace and adopted the flagship draft resolution by consensus. Today we expect the same strong endorsement from the Assembly. We sincerely thank those delegations that have already co-sponsored the draft resolution, and we look forward to more delegations joining from the floor ahead of its adoption in order to send a strong message to the world of the abiding commitment to peace of the United Nations and the universal appeal of a culture of peace.

I wish to conclude, Mr. President, by thanking you and your Office for your continued support for the follow-up to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of the Philippines to introduce draft resolution A/76/L.21.

Mr. Manalo (Philippines): It is my honour and privilege to join the Permanent Representative of Pakistan in introducing draft resolution A/76/L.21, entitled “Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace”.

We thank all Member States for their active participation and constructive input during the five informal consultations and about 20 intensive bilateral negotiations conducted over the past few weeks. Both the Philippines and Pakistan endeavoured to accommodate the views, concerns, contributions, suggestions and input expressed by many delegations during our consultations, which were conducted in an open, inclusive and transparent manner. We believe that, in having done so, we have furthered the objectives of the draft resolution, which we are honoured to submit for the seventeenth straight year.

Since November 2004, Pakistan and the Philippines have co-sponsored a draft resolution under the agenda item “Culture of peace”, affirming that mutual understanding and interreligious dialogue constitute important dimensions of the dialogue among civilizations and of the culture of peace. The annual draft resolution has two core objectives.

The first objective is to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue as an important tool in efforts aimed at achieving peace and stability and the full realization of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The second objective is to strengthen mechanisms and action for the promotion of a genuine and constructive dialogue across cultural and religious divides.

For this year’s negotiations, we witnessed creative efforts by delegations to agree on creative merger proposals, which contributed to a healthy exchange of ideas. Moreover, realizing that consistent constructive engagement and the challenge of addressing certain issues, the main sponsors have agreed to biennialize the draft resolution, which can also be viewed as our contribution to the revitalization agenda. That proposal will give us enough time to evaluate the draft resolution in order to help restore more faithfully the original objective of promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue, while focusing on mechanisms and programmes that will help achieve the draft resolution’s core objective.

Today our world faces complex challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, which not only cause immense human suffering and economic loss but also hinder greater socioeconomic cooperation. We also continue to witness a growing trend of xenophobia and religious intolerance, underpinned by the politics of identity, as well as the emergence of extremist ideologies

in different parts of the world. As States Members of the United Nations, we need to continue to build on our shared values and shared aspirations by strengthening mechanisms and actions through constructive dialogue, better understanding and a truly global culture of peace. In that context, we underline the important role of UNESCO and the invaluable contributions of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue at the national, regional and international levels.

Mr. Carazo (Costa Rica), Vice-President, took the Chair.

There should be no doubt as to the solidarity of Member States in embracing a culture of peace, a culture of partnerships and a culture of inclusive societies. On behalf of the Permanent Missions of Pakistan and the Philippines, I appeal to all Member States to adopt draft resolution A/76/L.21, entitled “Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace”.

Ms. Sulaiman (Brunei Darussalam): I am honoured to deliver this statement on behalf of the States members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

At the outset, ASEAN would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report under this agenda item (A/76/357). We are pleased to note the continued priority placed by the United Nations on the agenda, making the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue increasingly the business of the entire United Nations system.

South-East Asia is one of the most diverse regions in the world, with a population of more than 640 million people alongside various ethnicities and political, economic and social systems. ASEAN has continued to pursue a culture of peace, guided by the ASEAN Charter, in order to maintain and enhance peace, security and stability and further strengthen peace-oriented values in the region, in line with the Bangkok Declaration of 1967.

ASEAN has embarked on a journey to build and foster a caring, cohesive, equitable and peaceful community based on three pillars: the ASEAN Political-Security Community, the ASEAN Economic Community and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community. ASEAN has initiated several frameworks to promote cooperation

and confidence-building, such as the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South-East Asia and the Treaty on the South-East Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone, as well as ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN-Plus One, ASEAN-Plus Three, the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum and the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus, in order to build mutual trust and confidence and reinforce an open, transparent, inclusive and rules-based regional architecture with ASEAN at the centre.

ASEAN is also committed to realizing a rules-based community that fully adheres to ASEAN fundamental principles, shared values and norms, as well as the principles of international law governing the peaceful conduct of relations among States. In 2017, the ASEAN leaders adopted the Declaration on Culture of Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society. ASEAN’s culture of prevention is our contribution to the fuller development of the culture of peace.

The culture of prevention focuses on six key priorities: promoting a culture of peace and intercultural understanding, promoting a culture of respect for all, promoting a culture of good governance at all levels, promoting a culture of resilience and care for the environment, promoting a culture of healthy lifestyles and promoting a culture that supports the values of moderation.

In March, Brunei Darussalam hosted the fourth meeting of the ASEAN Working Group on a Culture of Prevention. The meeting considered post-pandemic recovery efforts and emphasized the significance of the implementation of the Declaration on a Culture of Prevention in order to respond to and address challenges that hinder peace, security and sustainable developments in the region.

At its core, multilateralism is a key component of promoting a culture of peace. That was further reaffirmed during the thirty-eighth ASEAN Summit, held under the chairmanship of Brunei Darussalam last month, when the ASEAN Leaders’ Declaration on Upholding Multilateralism was adopted. The Declaration, among other things, underscored the commitment to upholding and promoting multilateral cooperation, anchored in international law, towards achieving peace, security, stability and prosperity in the region and beyond.

ASEAN is committed to continue working with the United Nations, particularly through the Plan of Action to Implement the Joint Declaration on Comprehensive Partnership between ASEAN and the United Nations (2021-2025). The Plan of Action reflects our commitment to continue upholding multilateralism and cooperation in the evolving regional architecture, as well as to contribute to the maintenance and promotion of sustainable and inclusive peace and stability in the region and beyond. We are confident that the Plan of Action will contribute to greater collaboration between ASEAN and the United Nations, including to realize the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in a complementary manner.

We welcome the invaluable role of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue and greater understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures, religions and beliefs. We recognize its important role in coordinating the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites.

ASEAN continues to support the Security Council's women and peace and security agenda, as well as the youth, peace and security agenda, including through the adoption of the ASEAN Regional Forum Joint Statement on Promoting the Youth, Peace and Security Agenda at the twenty-eighth ASEAN Regional Forum, held on 6 August. The ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation has also been conducting activities with relevant ASEAN bodies and ASEAN external partners to promote a culture of peace and moderation in ASEAN. The ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation also continues to support the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry to implement the ASEAN Leaders' Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace and Security.

As a regional organization, we remain committed to engaging in meaningful dialogue with our external partners to help foster a global culture of peace through relevant ASEAN-led mechanisms. We share the aspiration of the international community to achieve global peace, security and prosperity through multilateralism, mutual respect, tolerance, preventive diplomacy, confidence-building, reconciliation and upholding the rule of law.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm ASEAN's commitment to promoting a culture of peace and its

readiness to work with the international community towards building an effective and inclusive multilateral system, anchored by the United Nations.

Ms. Hussain (Maldives): It is heartening to once again join the annual consensus, now in its twenty-second year, to reassert, reaffirm and renew the dedication of Member States to building a culture of peace.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report (A/76/357) on this agenda item and to extend our appreciation to UNESCO for coordinating the preparation of the report with the various United Nations entities.

When we adopted the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace by consensus in 1999, we lived in a very different world. Yet the notion that we are engaged in a collective commitment to build a culture of peace persists, and that shows how fundamental it is to the achievement of any human endeavour.

What the Secretary-General's report makes clear is that peace is not a goal that can be achieved by itself. It is built on foundations such as a healthy environment that provides healthy food, water and clean air, as well as adequate housing, health care, education and social needs that are met. At the multilateral level, we must use our foundational institutions, such as the United Nations, including the Assembly, to resolve differences before they become disputes.

As noted in the Secretary-General's report, the coronavirus disease has amplified the existing inequalities within and among societies and particularly affects the most vulnerable. That includes education. As schools around the world suddenly shifted to remote-based learning, it served as a spark of innovation for some; but for others, it widened an already existing socioeconomic and digital divide, which must be bridged to in order for us not to leave the most vulnerable disconnected.

With our increasingly online world, we must contend with the disturbing role that social media has played in fuelling discrimination, racism and islamophobia and in exacerbating polarization. We must ensure that online free speech is not used as an instrument to incite hatred or violence. Steps must be taken to build safe, collective online spaces. We must build an online culture of peace that echoes the words and commitments made here today.

Climate change also poses a significant threat to the Maldives and other small island developing States. Climate change encompasses slow onset events such as sea-level rise and erosion, which displace populations and undermine peace. What makes climate change particularly distressing is that it is also a threat multiplier that exacerbates existing challenges, including extreme weather events. Those events can set back decades of development gains.

Climate change undermines our ability to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and our capacity to lay solid foundations for enduring peace. We welcome the outcomes of the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, held in Glasgow, but the message is loud and clear — we urgently need to do more. Climate change places stress not just on our environments but also on our people and social systems. Adapting to its effects consumes an ever-increasing portion of our fiscal and human capacity.

We must remain vigilant against the compounding and ever-increasing impacts of climate change. Those impacts will undermine our food and water security as well as the global food chains that provide the necessities of life; if we do not act with foresight and solidarity, they will be a threat to peace everywhere.

The Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace rightly identifies Governments, civil society, media and individuals as key actors for its effective implementation. In the same spirit as the President's presidency of hope, peace requires inclusive and thoughtful engagement among all stakeholders of society, including Governments, youth groups, businesses and religious and cultural leaders. Only through open dialogue can we build a shared purpose and understanding.

We are a small island nation located in the heart of the Indian Ocean. For centuries, that has given us the opportunity to interact with people of different cultures. Through those engagements, we have also co-opted elements of their cultures into our own — thereby making ours richer and more peaceful. Our commitment to a culture of peace flows from our core values, prioritizing development and peace. The Administration of President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih has further enhanced those priorities, including through the restoration, revival and protection of our culture and heritage for future generations.

In conclusion, peace is not a given; it is something we must constantly work towards. Even when we achieve it, we must continue to nurture and protect it, for as we overcome one challenge another is on the horizon. Therefore, as we mark the twenty-second year of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, let us with renewed vigour and hope assert and reaffirm our commitment to build a culture of peace, a more tolerant global society and a harmonious and peaceful world for generations to come.

Mrs. González López (El Salvador) (*spoke in Spanish*): El Salvador welcomes the convening of this important debate of the General Assembly on the culture of peace, which is being held once again in the context of challenges exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In that framework, El Salvador thanks the Secretary-General for his report (A/76/357) on the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, which allows us to take stock of the progress we have made and challenges we face today in our continuing efforts to build peace, resilience, reconciliation and trust.

We also wish to thank Bangladesh, the Philippines and Pakistan for their able conduct of the negotiations of the important draft resolutions that the General Assembly will consider today (A/76/L.19 and A/76/L.21), which El Salvador supports.

We are all aware that the current crisis we face has amplified inequalities within and among societies. Beyond that, the pandemic has generated additional difficulties for the promotion of a culture of peace, among them increased discrimination, instability and violence. Their widespread repercussions have seriously jeopardized the progress achieved in promoting a culture of peace, human rights and sustainable development.

The crisis has also clearly shown that, today more than ever, it is important to invest in solidarity, trust and the ability to work hand in hand for the common good. That is why El Salvador wishes to acknowledge the efforts that the United Nations system has made for the culture of peace, particularly within the context of the strategies for response and recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

El Salvador firmly believes in global solidarity as the only way to recover from the crisis with resilience. An example of such solidarity is the focus that El Salvador has placed on the call of the World Health Organization

to change places in the supply chain for the COVID-19 Vaccine Global Access Facility. In a context that could be described as a race between access to vaccines and the efforts to prevent the appearance of variants, my country hopes that decision will make it possible to strengthen international cooperation in responding to the multiple crises triggered by the pandemic and to increase the number of people with equitable access to that basic and vital tool.

The pandemic has also shown the importance of speeding up digital technology as well as the adoption of measures to close the digital divide. For that reason, El Salvador has included in its priorities a strong emphasis on innovation and technology, which includes providing, with the valuable support of the United Nations system, technological tools to students through its Links to Education programme. My country hopes that approach will contribute to increasing equitable access to inclusive education and establishing a basis to promote the culture of peace through digital transformation.

In addition, the national Growing Together policy for supporting early childhood development, which the Government of El Salvador started last year, aims to nurture the necessary values for the promotion of a culture of peace from the initial phase of a person's development, thereby also strengthening individual and social resiliency. A recently adopted law, entitled "Nacer con Cariño" is another example of El Salvador's commitment to encouraging early childhood development.

That context has demonstrated the importance of continuing to encourage the culture of peace as a response to global challenges. El Salvador believes that mainstreaming a focus on peace in COVID-19 pandemic recovery is a task that everyone must undertake to ensure a future that will benefit all humankind.

Mr. Moncada (Venezuela) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is an honour to participate in this debate on the culture of peace. Aware of all that it represents — dialogue, understanding, cooperation, respect and tolerance for diversity — a culture of peace is fundamental to the prevention of conflicts and the strengthening of the stability and sustainable development of our peoples. In times of uncertainty and complex international dynamics, the promotion of a culture of peace depends on the defence and preservation of the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the

United Nations — the only way to achieve solid and lasting peace.

Peace is not sustained by imposing a world order by way of a new Cold War, with artificial divisions based on rules that are not agreed upon by the international community, or with attempts to impose a national ideology on the rest of the world. The achievements that are the result of relational practices between States and a body of international law built on the Charter of the United Nations for 76 years are today being questioned and must be preserved.

Our country has faced difficulties in recent years as a result of a campaign of aggression based on the illegal application of unilateral coercive measures that have undermined national peace and stability. Those are criminal actions, which have grown worse during the worst pandemic that humankind has faced in more than a century, and are part of a policy of calculated cruelty. Consciously depriving an entire nation of its means of subsistence constitutes an attack on peace and a crime against humanity.

Despite that aggression, and after an arduous economic, social and political organization process, on 21 November Venezuela witnessed a new day of elections, conducted in peace, to choose the regional and local authorities of our country. It was the twenty-ninth election in 22 years, and more than 70,000 candidates participated, including the most extremist groups supported by the Government of the United States of America.

The electoral process provided all the necessary guarantees for the Venezuelan people to fully exercise their rights and political freedoms through the right to vote, including extensive international observation. The elections, held amid international aggression, are a sign of the will to resolve our political issues with respect, tolerance and dialogue among all citizens. In Venezuela, we strengthen peace by affirming our independence and democracy.

Venezuela wishes to reaffirm its support for the implementation of the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, as well as for the continuity of the consideration of its annual draft resolution by the General Assembly, as we are aware of the importance of the meeting and the mutual enrichment of cultures and religions as an enduring formula for peace.

The harsh times caused by the coronavirus disease pandemic should make us aware of the fragility of life and serve to step up our efforts to preserve future generations. Multilateralism continues to be the space in which to join those efforts. We trust that the institutional framework of the United Nations will continue to be the guide to promote peaceful coexistence, respect for cultural diversity and dialogue among civilizations, which constitute the very essence of the culture of peace.

Mr. Hilale (Morocco) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I would like to thank the President for having organized this annual debate on the culture of peace. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/76/357). I also commend all of the facilitators of the draft resolutions that have been introduced today (A/76/L.19 and A/76/L.21), which Morocco has always co-sponsored.

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has challenged the international community to strengthen the centrality and importance of building a peaceful, stable and prosperous world. It showed to what extent a culture of peace is crucial to overcoming the gaps among and within societies. In that regard, Morocco particularly welcomes the role of initiatives undertaken by the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, to maintain the United Nations at the centre of multilateralism and all international efforts to fight the pandemic.

Religious leaders also have an important role to play to overcome the challenges posed by COVID-19 pandemic. In that regard, the Kingdom of Morocco, in response to the Secretary-General's call, organized a high-level conference in May 2020 on the theme "The role of religious leaders in addressing the multiple challenges of COVID-19".

The culture of peace is the very rationale behind our Organization. It is founded on the promotion of political understanding and constructive dialogue among States on the basis of mutual respect and in line with the purposes and principles enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. There are three pillars that guide United Nations action: development, peace and security, and human rights. In that regard, I would like to reiterate my country's full support for United

Nations efforts to centre the promotion of a culture of peace and dialogue among religions and cultures in the United Nations system.

In line with the guidelines of King Mohammed VI, the Kingdom of Morocco works tirelessly to promote peace and dialogue among religions and cultures and to foster mutual respect, respect for human dignity and good neighbourliness. Morocco also attaches great importance to the fight against all forms of discrimination, xenophobia, hatred and rejection of others, including Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and Christianophobia.

Morocco remains committed to continue actions to fight hate speech. We address a number of challenges that the world is currently facing, in particular the rise of ideology-based conflicts, intolerance, violence and extremism, encouragement of separatism and encouragement of armed groups. As a stakeholder working responsibly and actively within the international community, Morocco is convinced that it is essential to strengthen multilateralism and collective and coherent action within our Organization in order to advance dialogue, pluralism and mutual respect.

My country is proud to have an ancestral tradition of tolerance, moderation and peaceful coexistence, as well as the promotion of dialogue among cultures, religions and civilizations. Morocco is a crossroads and point of intermingling of various cultures, religions and civilizations. Respect for cultural diversity and religious diversity is an integral part of daily life and of our collective consciousness in Morocco. Just last week, Jews, Christians and Muslims celebrated Hanukkah hand in hand in the Neve Shalom Synagogue in Casablanca.

Morocco also works tirelessly to strengthen the values of peace, harmony, recognition and respect for cultural and religious diversity at the national, regional and international levels, in accordance with the guidelines of our King. I also recall the historic visit of His Holiness Pope Francis to Morocco on 30 and 31 March 2019, an initiative undertaken by King Mohammed VI. That was the second visit by a Pope after that of Pope Jean-Paul II in 1985 and is strong evidence of the leading role played by Morocco in promoting dialogue, understanding and cooperation among the various religions and cultures.

Morocco attaches fundamental importance to education, which we consider to be a key element in

ensuring the development of a culture of peace and working against discrimination, hatred and extremism. The Moroccan educational system teaches from the earliest age the virtues of peace and diversity. In that context, academic curricula and textbooks are systematically and periodically reviewed to ensure that they enshrine the virtues of co-existence, tolerance and harmony. Morocco also decided to teach the history and culture of the Jewish people in Arabic to our elementary school pupils.

Young people in Morocco are therefore the promoters of a number of different initiatives to combat all forms of discrimination. The Secretary-General's report mentions that, from 2018 to 2021, more than 5,000 young people from a number of countries, including Morocco, participated in the broad mobilization of youth-led organizations, universities and national stakeholders led by UNESCO and the Office of Counter-Terrorism to foster inclusive dialogue for the prevention of violent extremism.

Furthermore, to highlight the fair, noble and respectful values of Islam and combat all forms of radicalism and extremism, the Kingdom of Morocco has launched a number of different initiatives, including the reform of religious education and the promotion of cooperation with brotherly and friendly countries, in particular those in Africa.

In that framework, Morocco established the Mohammed VI Foundation as well as the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, in accordance with the directives of King Mohammed VI, Commander of the Faithful. In that framework, the Kingdom of Morocco provides for the multidimensional training of hundreds of clerics from a number of African, Arab, European and Asian countries. Multilaterally, Morocco works at two levels; it contributes actively and responsibly to the debate within various United Nations bodies on this issue and also participates in the formulation and dissemination of relevant United Nations resolutions.

In July 2019, Morocco introduced the historic resolution 73/328, on promoting interreligious and intercultural dialogue and tolerance in countering hate speech. The General Assembly also unanimously adopted resolution 75/309 in July 2021. For the first time in United Nations history, that resolution, introduced by Morocco, proclaimed 18 June each year as the International Day for Countering Hate Speech. That is

another illustration of Morocco's status as a vanguard of tolerance and dialogue among religions, cultures and nations.

In January, along with the brotherly Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Morocco also introduced resolution 75/258, on promoting a culture of peace and tolerance to safeguard religious sites, which was adopted by consensus and co-sponsored by a large number of Member States.

Morocco is also proud to have contributed to the implementation of plans of actions, documents and resolutions that constitute the foundation of efforts and initiatives within the United Nations to promote a culture of peace and the values of moderation and tolerance in the fight against all forms of discrimination and exclusion, including the United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites; the United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech; the Marrakesh Declaration on the Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities; the Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence; and the Fez Plan of Action for Religious Leaders and Actors to Prevent Incitement to Violence that Could Lead to Atrocity Crimes.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight that the Kingdom of Morocco is a founding member of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, and we welcome the presence of High Representative Miguel Ángel Moratinos. We participate actively in dialogue in global conferences and work for greater understanding and cultural and religious enrichment. We will spare no effort in promoting a dialogue of peace, allowing us to create synergies within the international community. Next December, Morocco will be honoured to host the Global Summit of the Alliance of Civilizations, which was delayed because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Ghazali (Malaysia): At the outset, my delegation would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/76/357). We also thank the delegation of Bangladesh and the delegations of Pakistan and the Philippines, respectively, for submitting draft resolutions A/76/L.19 and A/76/L.21 this year.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has affected humankind significantly. It has disrupted us economically and socially, wiping out some of the hard-won gains of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. It has impoverished more than 100 million people worldwide, pushing them into extreme poverty. We are also witnessing a growing schism among different peoples, cultures and religions. As a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multi-religious country, Malaysia understands very well the challenges confronting the world if that dangerous trend is not reversed.

Exclusion and inequalities breed instability, consume peace and disrupt sustainable development. Recognizing that, in August the Prime Minister of Malaysia introduced the concept of “keluarga Malaysia”, or “Malaysian family”, to further strengthen the ethos of togetherness and inclusivity that has been embraced by Malaysia since the time of its independence. In an ethnically diverse and culturally rich country such as ours, embracing diversity has made us stronger and better off.

As the Malay proverb goes, *Umpama selembat benang, dikait, ditenun dan dijalin akhirnya menjadi kain yang sempurna indahnya*, which means “Individual threads, when weaved, knitted and braided together, become a perfect and beautiful tapestry”. At times, we may forget that every individual thread in that tapestry has its purpose in the pattern of a grand design. However, now is not the time to forget. Instead, it should serve as a reminder that our differences, colours and shades, if celebrated, will contribute to the common good.

Malaysia takes an affirmative and positive approach to peace. We remain convinced that peace resides in mutual understanding, respect and tolerance among religions, cultures and peoples. Building a culture of peace is premised on equality and inclusivity, such as ensuring that people have access to food, shelter, education and decent work. In that regard, we need to ensure that the right to development is pursued and realized at the national, regional and global levels.

The Secretary-General’s report also highlights the rise in hate speech, extremism and xenophobia. Malaysia regrets the legitimization of extremism, including Islamophobia, in some political circles that permeate the sphere of public opinion and society at large.

We strongly disagree with the view that the defamation of religion is not an infringement of human rights. The defamation of religion constitutes a derogation of the right to belief and is not mutually exclusive with freedom of speech and opinion. Malaysia believes that both rights must be promoted and respected in a compatible and balanced manner. Understanding, tolerance and maintaining an exchange in our differences of conviction, religion and belief is vital to achieving a culture of peace. We are convinced that prejudices can be overcome through dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

A tapestry without different colours and shades would be dull and lifeless. The community of nations is a tapestry of diverse countries rich in different peoples, cultures and religions. Our diversity should not be seen as a threat that divides us but should be celebrated and embraced for our common good. Now is the time for us to recover and build a better and more resilient home with care. As a family of nations, we must work hand in hand and thread by thread and weave towards global peace and prosperity.

Ms. Chan Valverde (Costa Rica) (*spoke in Spanish*): Costa Rica welcomes the report of the Secretary-General on the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/76/357). The culture of peace teaches us that conflicts are resolved at the negotiating table, and not on the battlefield. It allows us to listen carefully to all relevant actors, especially women and girls and young people, who demand the space at the negotiating table that they deserve.

Peace is a dynamic and living impulse in the most energetic sense of the word. It is always an unfinished task, a constantly moving horizon. It is not the work of heroes or titans but of imperfect women and men struggling during difficult times for an uncertain but promising outcome. Peace cannot be forced or imposed through guns. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending increased to almost \$2 trillion in 2020 — an increase of 2.6 per cent in real terms over 2019. The more weapons we produce and modernize, the more they will escape our best management and control efforts.

The irony comes from the fact that, as the world continues to prepare for war, an invisible virus has brought us to our knees. In the view of Costa Rica, if only a fraction of those resources were used to

combat the pandemic, strengthen the global health infrastructure, address the climate crisis and step up investment to meet the Sustainable Development Goals, our generation could take pride in having redefined our priorities when circumstances required it.

However, we have not done so, and in many instances we continue to fall short on our sustainable development commitments. Costa Rica calls on all States to initiate without delay the gradual and intentional reduction of global military spending. Such a reduction is not only feasible but also indispensable, as reflected in Article 26 of the Charter of the United Nations.

In that regard, Costa Rica welcomes the Secretary-General's recognition that the excessive levels of global military spending have been absent from the normative frameworks of the women and peace and security agenda. Indeed, disarmament and demilitarization have also been absent from our discussion of this agenda item and the issues before us today.

We must put those issues on the table and consider how gender norms, including militarized masculinities, impact conflict and armed violence, as well as the production, manufacture, acquisition, possession and use of deadly weapons. Peace is not sustainable if it is not inclusive. Women and girls have never had the option of being absent from the horrors of war, violence and conflict, and we have been underrepresented in the response to the pandemic and other peace and security decision-making forums.

Addressing the inclusion of women and girls in peace and political processes must be about more than creating physical space for us or making sure there are enough women in the room. It must be about democratizing and reframing the discourse around women and girls and transforming those spaces so that they are truly able to honour our different roles, experiences and contributions to society.

Far from being helpless victims, women and girls have been on the front lines calling for a cessation of fighting, as well as offering their services as mediators to address the root causes of conflict and thus building sustainable peace. The response to the pandemic is not only about rectifying pre-existing inequalities but also building a more inclusive and resilient world for all, with women and girls at the centre of recovery.

Peace requires a robust multilateral system as well as greater international cooperation and solidarity. It

demands that we refocus our priorities, and above all that we renew our solemn commitment to leave no one behind. It demands that all global threats and all global challenges be addressed in a timely manner, and not by enabling a two-tier world. Peace is an unmistakably political process. A young person who is indifferent to, or annoyed by, politics or has given up on it does not advance the cause of peace. On the contrary, such young people actually cede power to those who believe that war is a legitimate means of resolving conflicts.

In the Preamble of the Charter, the States that make up this Organization commit to creating the conditions in which justice can be maintained. Of those conditions, perhaps the most elemental is will — the will to demand compliance with obligations; the will to raise our voices in the face of disrespect for international law; and above all the will to not allow ideas and practices that constitute an affront to all humankind go unnoticed.

It is not only through action that evil is condoned but also, and above all, through indifference and omission. To remain silent when the crimes are great and the responsibilities are clear is not to be neutral but to take the side of the aggressors. The most horrendous crimes do not cry out for revenge but for justice. Therefore, impunity remains incompatible with a culture of peace.

Mr. Al Hassan (Oman) (*spoke in Arabic*): On behalf of the delegation of the Sultanate of Oman, I deliver this statement on agenda item 16, which is of a special concern to the Government of my country as it believes in peace as a value and key principle of international relations.

We would like to thank the Secretary-General for his report on the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/76/357), which is a response to resolutions 75/25, on the follow-up to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, and 75/26, on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace. We would also like to thank the delegations of Bangladesh and Philippines for introducing and sponsoring draft resolutions A/76/L.19 and A/76/L.21.

We agree with the Secretary-General that more than ever there is an urgent need for dialogue, solidarity and renewed multilateral cooperation to counter hate speech, Islamophobia and contempt for other religions and followers of other religions as well as migrants, in particular those of African descent. There is also

an urgent need to counter misinformation, extremist narratives, inequality and exclusion

We believe that dialogue, solidarity and cooperation are effective means to build bridges for peacebuilding, resilience, reconciliation and trust through diversity. With peace, dialogue and understanding, people live in stability while cooperation grows among States and peoples. The Charter of the United Nations asserts those noble values and urges Member States to establish good-neighbourly relations, not to interfere in the affairs of States and to promote the spirit of coexistence, tolerance and cooperation in order to address the challenges we face in many areas, such as the current challenges of climate change, bridging the digital gap and fighting the coronavirus disease pandemic.

My country, the Sultanate of Oman, believes in the importance of peace; therefore, it is a key component of its foreign policy and a noble goal that it seeks to achieve in its relations with all other countries. The Sultanate of Oman will continue to support peace and the culture of peace, including all its human values and principles, with a view to enhancing cooperation and addressing many international crises. Peace cannot be achieved with words but with action and behaviour practised in accordance with international values, principles and norms and in a manner that does not contravene the Charter or international law. That is how we understand peace.

In conclusion, I would like to quote His Majesty Sultan Haitham Bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman, in his statement delivered on 23 February 2020:

“The message of Oman for peace will travel the world, carrying great heritage and noble goals. It builds and does not destroy. It converges and does not diverge. That is what we will work to maintain.”

Mr. Khan (Pakistan): At the outset, my delegation would like to express our appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report (A/76/357), which was requested by resolution 75/26, on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, sponsored by the delegations of the Philippines and Pakistan. Since 2004, the annual resolution has promoted interreligious and intercultural dialogue with the core objective of achieving peace and stability and promoting a culture of peace. Through the resolution, we also aim to strengthen mechanisms and actions that promote a genuine and constructive dialogue across cultural and religious divides.

In the current era of globalization, we have the unrivalled opportunity and responsibility to replace intolerance and discrimination with understanding and mutual acceptance. However, the greatest paradox of today's world is that, while it has brought people closer and created vast networks of connectivity and interdependence, it has also spawned divisions and frictions among and within societies.

Much of the growing mistrust can be traced to the growing gap in understanding and lack of tolerance among the various religions and civilizations of the world. Extremist and terrorist groups exploit that gap to propagate their own toxic agenda. It is therefore imperative for all of us to strengthen mechanisms and actions for the promotion of dialogue and understanding among all religions and civilizations with a view to restoring harmony and strengthening cooperation for peace and development.

Unfortunately, against the backdrop of increasing Islamophobia in many parts of the world, Muslims appear to be the primary target of theories such as the clash of civilizations. Islam is a religion of peace. It should not be judged by the acts of a fringe group of extremists, who exist in all societies, religions or belief systems. We should therefore effectively address the global drivers of worrisome trends, which include, among others, unresolved disputes and conflicts, lack of inclusive socioeconomic development and anti-migrant rhetoric. Interfaith and intercultural dialogues and cooperation are particularly significant means for addressing those issues, especially when considered in the context of today's volatile world.

Pakistan is a pluralistic, multicultural and multi-ethnic society. For us, respecting and promoting the freedom of religion or belief and the promotion of interfaith harmony is not only a duty to our citizens as a functioning democracy; it is also a way of life. Our founding fathers declared that the religion, caste or creed of a citizen had nothing to do with the business of the State. In Pakistan today we seek to build a polity based on the principles of equality, justice, tolerance and solidarity. Through initiatives such as the Ehsaas Programme, we are building a welfare State that looks after its poor, destitute and needy and aims to reduce inequality by investing in human development. Our Government's development priorities include a nationwide health insurance scheme and affordable housing for all.

Pakistan seeks to build its relations with its neighbours and other members of the international community on the basis of mutual respect and interreligious and intercultural tolerance and cooperation. A prime example of Pakistan's policy is the initiative taken by the Prime Minister of Pakistan to open the Kartarpur Sahib Corridor between India and Pakistan two years ago. In the past two years, the Corridor has not only fulfilled the earnest desire of the Sikh community around the world for easy access to the revered site but is also reflective of the primacy that Pakistan accords to all the religious minorities in the country. The Corridor has opened new vistas for the promotion of interfaith harmony. It was for those reasons that the Kartarpur Corridor was described by Secretary-General António Guterres as the "Corridor of Hope" during his visit to Kartarpur Sahib in February 2020.

The ultimate objective of dialogue should be to prevent conflict and promote peace and harmony through better understanding, moderation and a global culture of peace. It is our belief that, with enhanced dialogue and better understanding, it is possible to achieve the objective of a diverse yet harmonious and peaceful world, standing firmly on the pillars of peaceful co-existence and unity in diversity.

Ms. Al-Thani (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to commend the report of the Secretary-General on the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/76/357), which includes important recommendations. The State of Qatar is pleased to co-sponsor draft resolutions A/76/L.19 and A/76/L.21.

My country, the State of Qatar, welcomes all measures taken by the United Nations system to promote a culture of peace and interreligious dialogue, in particular given the spread of fear and misinformation, the increasing divisions among communities and the polarization of positions caused by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, which is a threat to international peace and security. That calls upon us, as an international community, to intensify our efforts and stand together in unity and solidarity to build just, peaceful and comprehensive societies that are able to recover in a better way from the current crisis.

In that connection, I would like to stress that the State of Qatar is committed to implementing the

Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace. It gives me pleasure to highlight today some of the initiatives my country has undertaken to promote a culture of peace at the national, regional and international levels. Those initiatives emanate from our social, religious and civilized heritage.

The State of Qatar has established a number of institutions related to spreading the culture of peace and intercultural and interreligious dialogue, accepting diversity, fighting terrorism and denouncing violence. Those institutions include the Doha International Centre for Interfaith Dialogue, the Arab Cultural House in Berlin and many other cultural and educational institutions too numerous to mention.

Given that education is a fundamental element of enhancing and promoting a culture of peace, the State of Qatar considers education as a top priority in all its humanitarian relief and development programmes. The Education Above all Foundation, for example, based in Doha, works with many international partners to provide quality education to millions of children and young people throughout the world, especially in areas that suffer from conflicts and disasters.

The State of Qatar believes in the important role of young people in achieving and sustaining peace and contributes to implementing the youth, peace and security agenda. Qatar will host a high-level global conference on comprehensive peace paths for young people on 20 and 21 January. The conference will be held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in collaboration with Finland, Colombia, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and the Education Above All Foundation. We are confident that the conference will be a turning point for the youth, peace and security agenda through its important expected outcomes, including guidelines to support the implementation of that agenda at the national level and a five-year strategy to promote the youth peace process.

As Member States are aware, in less than one year the State of Qatar will host the 2022 Fédération Internationale de Football Association World Cup, which will be held for the first time in the Middle East and Arab region. It is being organized in the belief of our country in — and its wise leadership in promoting — the important role of sports in achieving sustainable development and promoting peace and understanding among different cultures.

The State of Qatar sees peace in a comprehensive manner. Peace for Qatari diplomacy does not mean the absence of violence. Sustained peace is based on the resolution of issues and provision of justice. Therefore, the State of Qatar is greatly interested in joining international efforts in support of preventive diplomacy. Such efforts have led to positive results that are agreeable to all parties concerned and have contributed to the promotion of international peace and security and welcomed by the international community.

In conclusion, the State of Qatar renews its commitment to providing support for all efforts to promote a culture of peace and non-violence for the good of humankind as a whole.

Mr. Montalvo Sosa (Ecuador) (*spoke in Spanish*): It is a special privilege for me to address the General Assembly while it is being presided over by the Permanent Representative of the brotherly country of Costa Rica, with whom we share the ideals and principles of peace and democracy.

Ecuador welcomes the report of the Secretary-General (A/76/357) and notes the submission of draft resolution A/76/L.19, entitled “Follow-up to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace”. I thank the delegation of Bangladesh in particular for its leadership during the discussion and negotiation of the draft resolution.

We must express our concern about the persistence and proliferation of violence and conflict in various parts of the world. We must eradicate all forms of discrimination and intolerance. Peace requires a positive and dynamic participatory process in which dialogue is encouraged and differences are resolved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation. Direct dialogue is the best prevention tool.

The coronavirus disease pandemic has had a negative impact on various spheres of society, reversing hard-won progress in development and hampering progress. We recognize that the pandemic demands constant leadership, multilateral commitment and the need to address the special challenges posed by the infodemic — the disinformation pandemic. We also emphasize the crucial need for access to free, reliable, factual, multilingual, specific, precise, clear information that is based on science, where appropriate, to slow the spread of the virus.

The infodemic is just one example or illustration of the many issues that are addressed in a complementary manner in draft resolution A/76/L.19. Its broad scope leads us to recall that relevant and central idea contained in the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, which states that “since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed”.

The concept of the culture of peace is deeply embedded in the regulations and activities of Ecuador, and above all in the minds of a peaceful people who are now threatened by the extreme violence of transnational organized crime, the perpetrators of which believe they have the means to undermine our democratic institutions to advance their monstrous objectives. They will not succeed because Ecuador is a meeting point, a country that renews daily its commitment to peace, development and democracy.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places significant emphasis on promoting a culture of peace. We need to get back on track to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by strengthening solidarity and designing equitable recovery strategies that allow the building of resilient societies that are capable of facing future crises.

In conclusion, I wish to reiterate our commitment to deepen efforts to establish a global culture of peace and revamp the scope of its implementation at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Mr. Lim (Singapore): Singapore aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Brunei Darussalam on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and adds the following points in its national capacity.

My delegation thanks the Secretary-General for his comprehensive report on the promotion of a culture of peace and interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace (A/76/357). The examples cited of how respect for diversity and cultural pluralism are key enablers of a culture of peace are especially pertinent today. The coronavirus disease pandemic has widened fault lines and social tensions both within and among societies. It has threatened not just our health but the fragile fabric of society itself. In that context, achieving a global culture of peace is more crucial than ever.

Singapore is a diverse society in a densely populated city State. Five and half million people — Chinese, Malays, Indians, Eurasians and others — live together on an island smaller than New York City. Many of the world's great religions are represented. We enjoy a high level of racial and religious harmony. People live, study and grow up together and celebrate one another's cultural festivals. According to the 2019 Gallup World Poll, 95 per cent of Singaporeans in Singapore said that Singapore was a good place to live for racial and ethnic minorities. The global average was about 70 per cent, and Singapore was ranked first worldwide among the 124 countries polled.

But the state of peace that we enjoy today was not always in place. Our current harmony is built on painful lessons drawn from the racial riots that marred our early years of independence. It remains a continuous work in progress for us, and we cannot rest on our laurels.

To protect and promote that harmony, we continue to build bridges of understanding across racial, religious and cultural differences. At the initiative of our President, Singapore organized the inaugural International Conference on Cohesive Societies in 2019, which brought together more than 1,000 delegates from almost 40 countries. We look forward to the next iteration of the conference in 2022.

Articles 5 and 8 of the Declaration on a Culture of Peace affirm the key roles of civil society and religious bodies in the full development of a culture of peace. Recognizing that ground-up organizations and people of faith themselves play the largest role in building mutual understanding and trust, the Singapore Government also works closely with our non-governmental organizations, such as the Inter-Religious Organisation.

Founded over 70 years ago by leaders of six different faiths, the organization has grown to reflect the religious diversity of Singapore and is now led by a Council of 31 leaders of 10 different faiths. By working directly through religious groups, the organization has made significant ground-up contributions to religious harmony in Singapore, including by building networks among people of different faiths, countering religious extremism and radicalization and promoting local and international interfaith dialogue.

Our religious and community leaders also work with each another directly to resolve sensitivities that arise from time to time, preventing them from flaring up and causing wider misunderstandings. Their efforts

complement national initiatives such as our annual Racial Harmony Day, which is celebrated in schools to expose our students to racial, religious and cultural sensitivities from a young age.

Singapore will continue working closely with the international community to promote interracial and interreligious harmony towards our common goal of fostering a global culture of peace.

Mr. Alenezi (Kuwait) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, I would like to sincerely thank the Secretary-General, Mr. António Guterres, for his report (A/76/357), which reviews the measures taken within the United Nations system to encourage a culture of peace and interreligious dialogue, while highlighting the political and economic challenges that the world faces today.

The State of Kuwait supports the appeal for international solidarity and multilateral cooperation launched by the Secretary-General in his report. We also agree with him on the importance of ending the state of emergency due to the coronavirus disease and recovering from the pandemic, as well as the need to create interreligious and intercultural dialogue in order to achieve international solidarity for building sustainable peace.

The Secretary-General's report on the culture of peace complements his report *Our Common Agenda* (A/75/982), which includes recommendations and proposals to ensure the economic and political stability of States and create a culture of peace among peoples.

For the second consecutive year, the international community faces economic challenges and significant pressure on health systems due to the continued pandemic, which has imposed a new reality with clear negative implications for people in all walks of life. Borders have been closed and limitations have been placed on the international mobility for individuals and goods, in addition to reduced communication and dialogue among different peoples and religions. Fears and concerns have arisen once again because of a new variant of the coronavirus. Many countries have taken measures to close their borders and airports, which will undoubtedly have a negative impact and result in a wider gap instead of a convergence of ideas and opinions.

That will also deepen disagreements on social and cultural concepts, while fuelling intolerance and national and ethnic feelings, thereby undermining

international solidarity. We must therefore redouble our efforts to bring our positions together and promote joint action to address such challenges. My country's delegation is of the view that the process of addressing the pandemic and recovering from it must be a top priority of the international community in order to settle other important issues.

In that context, we welcome the initiative of the President of the General Assembly, Mr. Abdullah Shahid, to hold a high-level meeting on vaccines in January 2022 in order to highlight the importance of providing vaccines fairly and at low prices, while supporting the countries most affected by the spread of the pandemic. Those countries must be supported to produce vaccines, because continued instability due to the pandemic in the most affected countries will prevent all of us from achieving our noble objective — to entrench a culture of peace and achieve a sustainable and dignified life.

The culture of peace is entrenched in my country. One of the articles of the Kuwaiti Constitution states that peace is a State objective. The spirit of tolerance, acceptance of others, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and dialogue among civilizations have been inherent in Kuwaiti society for many centuries. In our contemporary age, those values are enshrined in our Constitution, which ensures the freedom of expression, the freedom of religions and the freedom of religious practices.

In the context of the efforts of the State of Kuwait to promote a culture of peace, tolerance and anti-extremism, the High-level Committee to Reinforce Moderation was established with a view to promoting the principle of moderation and a moderate approach, as well as the tolerant Islamic culture, which calls for tolerance, anti-extremism and anti-terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

During the spread of the coronavirus disease pandemic, the High-level Committee launched initiatives and developed strategies to highlight the positive aspects of anti-extremism, while educating young people about the noble values of Islam and rectifying erroneous ideas by holding seminars and discussion panels in person and through social media.

In conclusion, my country emphasizes that it is ready to participate in all regional and international efforts to strengthen a culture of peace and enhance dialogue among civilizations, while upholding the

values of moderation, tolerance and mutual respect, as well as rejecting extremism, hatred and violence in all its forms and manifestations. We urge all Member States to cooperate in a unified manner through the international and multilateral system to achieve a more peaceful and tolerant world for current and future generations.

Mr. Pedroso Cuesta (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*):

As we meet here in the Hall to speak about peace and the promotion of a culture and an environment that contribute thereto, the use and the threat of use of force in international relations continues, unconventional warfare activities are conducted and interference in the internal affairs of sovereign States is carried out in order to satisfy the thirst for imperial domination.

At the same time, unilateralism prevails. Even amid the challenging conditions imposed by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, the implementation of unilateral coercive measures continues, which not only violates the Charter of the United Nations and international law but also impedes the exercise of the right to development of the countries that suffer their effects.

There can be no peace without sustainable, equitable and inclusive economic and social development. There can be no peace as long as the inequalities resulting from the unjust international economic order, which are the root causes of conflicts, continue to be exacerbated. There can be no peace — and no culture conducive to peace — if hate speech, racism, xenophobia and ideological intolerance continue to be encouraged; if the issue of human rights is politicized to the disadvantage of developing countries; and if disrespect continues for the indigenous culture, history, idiosyncrasies and diverse religions of peoples.

Advancing a culture of peace paves the way for a better, more equitable and sustainable world, which calls for the promotion of multilateralism and the strict observance of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of international law.

Cuba is fully committed to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, as well as the Proclamation of Latin America and the Caribbean as a Zone of Peace, which was adopted in Havana in 2014 in the framework of the second Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

The Proclamation reaffirms the objective of rooting out forever from our region the use and the threat of use of force, as well as of advancing the peaceful settlement of disputes and fostering friendly and cooperative relations among Latin American and Caribbean peoples and their relations with other nations, regardless of their differences.

Cuba knows the value of peace. For more than six decades, we have had to face the hostility of the United States Government and its pursuit of unconventional warfare and subversion against my country, as well as the impacts of the most protracted economic, commercial and financial blockade imposed against any country, which was intensified during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, for the sole reason of having decided, in a sovereign manner, to build a social model that is an alternative to the dictates of the empire.

As President Miguel Díaz Canel Bermúdez recently stressed, Cuba has been, is and will always be a country of peace and will not yield to the attempts to sow confusion in our country, attempts that are designed to cause instability in our nation, discredit it and justify the doctrine of regime change.

Mr. Sharma (India): The culture of peace is the cornerstone of the global order to build inclusive and tolerant societies. Under the auspices of the United Nations, the promotion of a culture of peace has expanded into a global discourse.

India has always believed in pluralism. It is also embedded in the ancient Sanskrit religious text, the Rig Veda, which states that “God is One, but learned men describe Him in many ways”. As the great Indian philosopher Swami Vivekananda said, “We not only believe in universal toleration, but we accept all religions as true”. Continuing that rich heritage, India has promoted that culture, inter alia, through tolerance, understanding and respect for all religions and cultures under the overarching umbrella of a pluralistic ethos and democratic principles, which is enshrined in our Constitution.

India is not just the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism but is also a country in which the teachings of Islam, Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrianism have taken firm root, and the Sufi tradition of Islam has also flourished. Today every one of the world’s major religions has a home in India, making it a nation of unparalleled diversity of continental proportions.

For millenniums, India has regularly provided shelter to those persecuted in foreign lands and allowed them to thrive. India is not just about a culture but a civilization in itself. The enduring principle of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, which means “the entire world is one family”, has guided our constant interaction and exchange of thoughts with the outside world.

We appreciate the efforts of Bangladesh in submitting draft resolution A/76/L.19, on the follow-up to the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, which India is happy to co-sponsor. We firmly believe that the exercise of the right to the freedom of opinion and expression and full respect for the freedom to seek, receive and impart information play an important role in promoting pluralism and combating religious intolerance.

Unfortunately, we are witnessing disconcerting trends in the world of today. There is a surge in instances of intolerance, discrimination and acts of violence based on religion or belief. Let me say that we strongly condemn acts of discrimination or violence motivated by anti-Semitism, Christianophobia and Islamophobia.

However, we are deeply concerned by the growing manifestations of intolerance, discrimination or violence against followers of other religions as well, which have contributed to the emergence of contemporary forms of religiophobia, especially anti-Hindu, anti-Buddhist and anti-Sikh phobias, which need to be countered urgently by the United Nations and all Member States. Those contemporary forms of religiophobia need to be factored into our discussions.

We urge for strengthened international efforts to foster a global discourse on the promotion of a culture of peace and to reaffirm that interreligious dialogue should be broader and inclusive of all religions and faiths. I call on the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to act accordingly and to speak for all, and not just a select few.

In today’s world, intolerance, hatred, violence and terrorism have almost become the norm. There can be no doubt that terrorism, which is a manifestation of intolerance and violence, is the antithesis of all religions and cultures. We are troubled by the increase in resources, financial and otherwise, that are being made available to violent and terrorist groups that misuse religion to justify and propagate their agendas. India will continue to spread the message of humanity, pluralism and democracy.

We reiterate our call to fight the negative forces of intolerance, violence and discrimination together. Let us build a culture of peace together, rather than fail separately.

Mr. Boncoeur (Haiti) (*spoke in French*): My delegation would like to thank the President for convening this meeting on the culture of peace and for the opportunity to participate in this debate. My delegation has also taken due note of the comprehensive report of the Secretary-General (A/76/357) and its relevant recommendations.

Despite the progress made during the period from May 2020 to August 2021, as the Secretary-General underlines in his report, it is nevertheless necessary to recall that the culture of peace, because of its complexity, requires much more commitment and a greater involvement by stakeholders. In that sense, we encourage Member States, United Nations entities, regional organizations and relevant actors to do more to promote peacebuilding and peace-sustaining activities.

To establish lasting peace, my delegation believes that education and dialogue represent the most effective means of developing a sense of universal values and capacities to recognize and accept the values required for living together, and therefore of contributing to a more peaceful, more just, more prosperous and more equitable world. Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed. That concept, set out in the preamble to the Constitution of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, reflects the importance of education in sustaining peace.

In a context in which uncertainty, violence, racism, inequalities and hate speech continue to grow, global solidarity becomes more than necessary. In that regard, my delegation takes this opportunity to reiterate the observations and recommendations of the Secretary-General. As such, we commit ourselves to supporting all initiatives aimed at promoting the culture of peace and to joining United Nations efforts to promote dialogue,

understanding and cooperation among religions and cultures in the service of peace.

In conclusion, I would like to refer to the historic and very significant statement delivered by the late Pope Paul VI on 4 October 1965 before the United Nations. In that speech, he made a strong appeal for peace. He said:

“relationships between the peoples should be regulated by reason, by justice, by law and by negotiation; not by force nor by violence nor war, neither by fear nor by fraud.” (*A/PV.1347, para. 27*)

According to His Holiness Pope Paul VI,

“it is pride [...] which provokes tensions, struggles for prestige, predominance, colonialism, selfishness; it is pride that shatters brotherhood.” (*ibid., para. 32*)

In that context, he recalled the important United Nations mission of teaching people peace. He also said:

“You, gentlemen, have done and are doing a great work; you are teaching men peace. The United Nations is the great school where that education is acquired, and we are here in the *Aula Magna* of that school. Whoever takes a place here becomes both pupil and teacher in the art of building peace. And when you leave this hall, the world looks to you as to the architects, the builders of peace.” (*ibid., para. 35*)

Let us make sure that we live up to that great and noble task.

The Acting President (*spoke in Spanish*): We have heard the last speaker on this item for this meeting. We shall continue the debate on the morning of Thursday, 9 December in this Hall, following the conclusion of the consideration of other agenda items already scheduled that morning.

The General Assembly has thus concluded this stage of its consideration of agenda item 16.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.