



## Fact Sheet

# INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR TOLERANCE

**16 NOVEMBER 2005**

*“No Muslim, no Jew, no Christian, no Hindu, no Buddhist -- no one who is true to the principles of any of the world's faiths, no one who claims a cultural, national or religious identity based on values such as truth, decency and justice -- can be neutral in the fight against intolerance.” (excerpt from UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's opening remarks at the Department of Public Information Seminar on Anti-Semitism, New York, 21 June 2004)*

On 16 November each year, the international community observes the International Day for Tolerance, with activities directed towards both educational establishments and the wider public. Sixty years after the signatories of the UN Charter resolved to "practice tolerance" and to "live together in peace with one another as good neighbours", tolerance is still a main focus of UN action. The decision to observe the International Day was taken by the General Assembly in its resolution 51/95 of 12 December 1996. This action came in the wake of the United Nations Year for Tolerance, 1995, proclaimed by the Assembly in 1993 on the initiative of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

The International Day of Tolerance focuses the world's attention on tolerance as an essential condition for peace, democracy and sustainable development. The world's leaders recognized this when, in adopting the Millennium Declaration in 2000, they placed tolerance among the fundamental values on which international relations in the twenty-first century must be based.

Five years later, the Heads of State and Government who met at United Nations Headquarters in New York from 14 to 16 September 2005 declared that the protection of human rights is a central purpose of the United Nations, and that without human rights there can be no security and no development. The leaders backed up this declaration by adopting clear and unambiguous commitments for the promotion and protection of human rights. They reaffirmed that tolerance is one of the common fundamental values that are essential to international relations, and acknowledged the diversity of the world, and recognized that all cultures and civilizations contribute to the enrichment of humankind. Underlining that sports can foster peace and development and contribute to an atmosphere of tolerance and understanding, the world's leaders encouraged discussions in the General Assembly for proposals leading to a plan of action on sport and development.

### "Alliance of Civilizations" Initiative

In July 2005, UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced the launch of an initiative for an "Alliance of Civilizations". The initiative is intended to respond to the need for a committed effort by the international community -- both at the institutional and civil society levels -- to bridge divides and overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization which potentially threaten world peace. The Alliance will aim to address emerging threats emanating from hostile perceptions that foment violence, and to bring about cooperation among various efforts to heal such divisions.

Events of recent years have heightened the sense of a widening gap and lack of mutual understanding between Islamic and Western societies -- an environment that has been exploited and exacerbated by extremists in all societies. The Alliance of Civilizations is intended as a coalition against such forces, as a movement to advance mutual respect for religious beliefs and traditions, and as a reaffirmation of humankind's increasing interdependence in all areas -- from the environment to health, from economic and social development to peace and security. The Secretary-General is also bringing together a high-level group of eminent persons to guide the initiative. The group is expected to present a report with recommendations and a practical plan of action in late 2006.

Tolerance is respect, acceptance and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty, it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace. [Article 1.1 of the Declaration on Principles of Tolerance, proclaimed and signed by the Member States of UNESCO on 16 November 1995]

### "Unlearning Intolerance" initiative

In 2004, the UN Department of Public Information initiated a new seminar series at UN Headquarters on "Unlearning Intolerance". The first seminar, held on 21 June 2004, was on "Confronting Anti-Semitism: Education for Tolerance and Understanding". The second seminar on 7 December 2004, addressed the subject of "Confronting Islamophobia: Education for Tolerance and Understanding".

The panel discussions, moderated by Shashi Tharoor, Under-Secretary-General for Communications and Public Information, were also webcast live at <http://www.un.org/webcast>. Panellists included eminent writers, scholars, theologians and experts on anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and other issues relating to tolerance and education. The launch of this major initiative came at the mid-point of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World, proclaimed by the General Assembly in 1998. The series aims to examine different manifestations of intolerance and explore ways to promote respect and understanding among peoples. As its name suggests, the series offers opportunities to discuss how intolerance, wherever it exists and for whatever reason, can be "unlearned" through education, inclusion and example.

### Education as a tool for promoting tolerance

Louise Arbour, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, recently expressed her view that all forms of intolerance must be combated by celebrating the diversity and the differences that enrich the human family. "By promoting tolerance and better understanding between and among communities, education is moving our minds from bias and prejudice to respect and appreciation for other cultures, religions and traditions", she stated. "Yet we should not look at education only as a way of preventing or overcoming bigotry. Education is above all the greatest tool of empowerment and we should ensure that its full potential is made available to those who may be the targets of violent intolerance in part because of their powerlessness." (*excerpt from introductory remarks to the panel discussion on "Discrimination and hate crimes: countering the violence of intolerance", 21 March 2005, Geneva*)

Article 26 (2) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the international community in 1948, states that "Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace."

### UNESCO Film Production Project

In order to stem the occurrences of the practices of ethnic cleansing and racism on the Internet, as well as the ongoing stigmatization of minorities, indigenous peoples and migrant workers, and in accordance with its Constitution, UNESCO continues to give its attention to the education of young people, especially human rights education. It is also continuing to work on pluralism, sustainable development and the promotion of cultural diversity, in order to promote tolerance.

UNESCO recently launched a call to television and film professionals to submit production proposals for a series of grants to contribute to the development of human rights, peace, tolerance and the fight against discrimination. This project aims at putting information and communication technologies (ICTs) to the use of programme development on major societal and development issues, by providing public service broadcasters in developing countries with training, production and distribution opportunities in these areas. From the 200 production proposals received, UNESCO has selected eight proposals for film productions for its new project. At the end of this initiative, UNESCO will produce and distribute a series of audiovisual productions targeted to all sectors of the public, but particularly for young adults between the ages of 20 to 35 years. The productions will be made available through the media, on DVD and on-line before the end of 2005. For further information, please visit the project's website at: [www.unesco.org/webworld/cc/ictpsb](http://www.unesco.org/webworld/cc/ictpsb).

Activities to promote the International Day for Tolerance

At the field level, the worldwide network of United Nations Information Centres, Services and Offices undertake a wide variety of activities to promote International Days, including the International Day for Tolerance. Such activities in the past have included media outreach, translation and dissemination of UN system press releases; the organization of special events; translation of UN publications into local languages; production of radio and television programmes; preparation of newsletters and bulletins; briefings to the public; lectures and speeches; and screening of videos and films.

Other activities have included placing the message by the Secretary-General for the International Day for Tolerance in local newspapers, radio stations and TV; organizing round tables and seminars; giving radio and TV interviews on the subject of tolerance and other human rights issues; organizing photo exhibits and poster and essay contests on issues related to tolerance; and participating in radio and television programmes, explaining the importance of tolerance.

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**Information about the work of the United Nations to promote human rights can be accessed at the following websites: [www.un.org/issues/](http://www.un.org/issues/) and [www.unhchr.ch/](http://www.unhchr.ch/).**

**UNESCO publications and tools to build tolerance, including "Ten ideas for observing the International Day of Tolerance", can be accessed at: [www.unesco.org/tolerance/](http://www.unesco.org/tolerance/).]**

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