



Seoul Statement on ASEM Interfaith Dialogue

We, the representatives of ASEM partners, reflecting various cultural, religious and civilizational heritages, gathered in Seoul on 23-25 September 2009 at the Fifth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, discussed the ways to promote respect for diversity and to raise public awareness on the importance of its mission under the theme of 'Bridging Divides through Interfaith Dialogue' and agreed on the following to further advance the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue.

1. We noted that at the Ninth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, the Ministers recognized and expressed their support for various intercultural and interfaith dialogues within the framework of ASEM as advocating respect for values such as solidarity, tolerance, human rights and freedom.
2. We renewed our commitment to consolidating further the Interfaith Dialogue that has been making a significant contribution to the enrichment of Asian and European cultures and faiths as well as the deepening of Asia-Europe relations. We reaffirmed the Bali Declaration, the Larnaca Action Plan, the Nanjing Statement and the Amsterdam Statement, and appreciated the progress made so far through them all.
3. Under the theme of 'Bridging Divides through Interfaith Dialogue', we discussed ways to enhance the role of ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in reconciling religious, cultural and social differences through the development of an effective public communication strategy and implementation of the Dialogue's recommended action items.
4. We noted that many communities across the world are becoming increasingly culturally and religiously diverse. We underlined that

social stability and cohesion in diverse communities can be enhanced significantly through the promotion of interfaith dialogues.

5. We recognized that the growing interaction among people with different cultural and religious backgrounds in the era of globalization has brought about both opportunities and challenges. We underlined that increased contacts among different cultures and religions, together with the enhanced diversity in societies, should be perceived as great opportunities to further enrich our societies rather than as causes of the tensions and conflicts.
6. We recognized that the lack of intercultural and interreligious tolerance, understanding and respect can often lead to tensions and conflicts between different cultures and faiths. We were convinced that intercultural and interfaith dialogues need to be promoted further in order to enhance mutual understanding and respect as well as to foster peaceful co-existence and prosperity among diverse cultures and religions.
7. We recognized that various initiatives on intercultural and interfaith dialogues at the national, regional and international levels are mutually reinforcing and contributing to each other. We noted that a number of such initiatives are being taken forward in regional and international fora such as UNESCO, Alliance of Civilizations, the Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, the Ministerial Meeting on Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace and the UN General Assembly, through its resolutions on the promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue for peace, cooperation and understanding.
8. In particular, we welcomed the Alliance of Civilizations' efforts to facilitate dialogue among diverse cultures and civilizations including at their Second Forum held in Istanbul, Turkey from April 6-7, 2009. In the same spirit, we also welcomed Indonesia's initiative to host the ASEM Interfaith/ Intercultural Retreat for Religious Leaders in Yogyakarta, on 9-12 September 2009, and its initial conclusion underscoring the important roles of the religious leaders in promoting tolerance and harmony in multi-religious/ multicultural societies.
9. We renewed our commitment to combating extremism and terrorism and upholding international peace and security. We underlined that the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogues and the peaceful and

harmonious co-existence of different religions and cultures contribute significantly to the maintenance of international peace and security.

10. We recognized that interfaith dialogues may contribute to easing public concerns and achieving social cohesion from a religious perspective. We noted that sharing common values through such forum helps illustrate that the bonds which connect us as a global society far outweigh those differences which can drive us apart.
11. We reconfirmed our commitment to upholding, promoting and protecting the rights of individuals, including the rights to freedom of expression, freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief, as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

(Interfaith Dialogue and Social Cohesion: Overcoming Current Global Challenges)

12. In the Working Group on 'Interfaith Dialogue and Social Cohesion,' we recognized that the present challenges are multidimensional and global in nature. To promote social cohesion, interfaith dialogue can be used to acknowledge different views and approaches. Commonalities amongst faiths could be identified via interfaith dialogue and would serve as a basis for seeking solutions.
13. Presentations were made on various religious perspectives on economics. It was acknowledged that consideration of the ideas of different faiths by governments and secular institutions may help in creating harmonious and stable economic systems.
14. We suggested that re-emphasizing the values that are common amongst different faiths would be an effective way of fostering a spirit of cooperation.
15. We recognized that sustainable development requires knowledge and creativity. We encourage all religious communities to work together to address common issues of concern including the environment, food security and poverty.

(Interfaith Dialogue and Public Communication)

16. In the Working Group on 'Interfaith Dialogue and Public Communication', we agreed on the need to implement the findings laid down in the declarations and statements adopted by the previous ASEM

Interfaith Dialogue meetings with regard to the activities in the field of media.

17. Having recalled the practical implications of a new interaction between interfaith policy and use of mass media, we recognized the importance of encouraging the implementation of the proposals of the 7th ASEF Journalist's Colloquium "Keeping the Faith: Reporting on Religion", held in Seoul on 21-22 September, 2009, meant to set a basis for effective public communication strategy for governments, religious leaders and media groups to promote interfaith dialogue. (See report in annex)
18. We emphasized, furthermore, to assist the mass media practitioners in promoting interfaith dialogue and common understanding among citizens of different faiths. Such actions may be:
 - to facilitate fora of education (colloquia, seminars etc.) to inform media practitioners on religious affairs and religious leaders on the use of modern mass media.
 - to encourage the mass media to help the creation of new, positive narratives in reporting religious matters.
 - to encourage the exchange of "face to face" interaction between journalists and religious representatives.
 - to motivate religious organizations to use their own means of media for the purpose of contributing to active interfaith dialogue.
 - to motivate the religious communities to involve media experts in dealing with public communication needs when necessary and appropriate.
 - to jointly define common policies in order to harmonize the fundamental rights of freedom of expression with that of freedom of belief.

(Program and Policy Development)

19. In the Working Group on 'Program and Policy Development,' we have discussed practical and realistic actions for government policies and education programs.
20. We reaffirmed the importance to respect freedom of religions and beliefs to maintain an unbiased attitude towards all of them. Governments have an important role in promoting and enhancing peaceful co-existence and social cohesion. Interfaith dialogue can be a powerful tool to promote

the social cohesion. Therefore, we recommend that governments facilitate interfaith dialogues and community programs for both adults and children at national, local, and grass roots level.

21. We placed a particular emphasis on educating the younger generations about diversity as part of enhancing their understanding of different faiths and cultures. We noted that for education to promote awareness on cultural and religious diversity, anti-discrimination and human rights are critical to overcome misunderstandings and stereotypes and to prevent all forms of extremism. We encourage ASEM partners to support this education through various means to protect human rights and prevent discrimination.
22. We recommend educational institutions to explore ways in providing information on diverse cultural and religious traditions, to enable the younger generations to discover shared values that are essential to preserving the dignity of humans and the harmonious co-existence of people of all cultures and faiths.
23. To enhance the impact of our ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, we encourage each government to inform all relevant partners in the field of education and religion – including existing organizations for interfaith dialogue – of the outcome of our conference and find ways to implement our recommendations.

We congratulate the Republic of Korea and the Republic of Finland for successfully co-hosting the Fifth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue. We express our appreciation to the Republic of Austria, the Kingdom of Belgium, the Republic of Bulgaria, the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Denmark, the Federal Republic of Germany, the Republic of Indonesia, the Italian Republic, Japan, Malaysia, the Kingdom of the Netherlands, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Spain and the Kingdom of Thailand for co-sponsoring the Dialogue. We also appreciate the active participation and support given by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF).

We appreciate the readiness of the Kingdom of Spain and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to co-host the Sixth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in Spain in 2010.