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**Q and A Session following Secretary-General Kofi Annan's
lecture at the Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies (the
Sheldonian Theatre)
28th June 1999 11.00 am**

Q: Secretary-General, how do you address the question of conflict that arises between individuals as opposed to cultures and nations?

conflict

SG: I think that we need to start with education and I think the issue of shared values .. (inaudible) not only the question of human rights, but the basic education each religion offers us as individuals, charity, respect for each other. If we take this on board, we as individuals confront each other with respect, accepting our differences and not attempting to impose our wish or our culture on others or believing that we are superior to the other human being. I think our dialogue and our relationship and our contacts will be much smoother and I hope this is what each of us will try and do and give to our children. That we should not only accept that there are differences in culture, in religion, in civilizations and between us, and that we should celebrate these differences, and this is part of life and one should not try and confront, and so (inaudible) if we are talking of States and communities, and States and communities are made up of individuals, and the values that I have indicated here, if they are embraced by individuals, would also improve relations between them.

Find a common set of values. respect all ways

SG: I am from Jerusalem where the dialogue of civilizations and the prospect for the coexistence of cultures could ... (inaudible) my question to you is about democracy and diplomacy, all observers are now analysing the coalition-building that Barak is undertaking. My question to you is the following: what prevails, the international will or the national whim? So my question to you is about the interrelationship between democracy, responsibility and diplomacy and what prevails, the international will or the national whim?

international will or national whim?

SG: Let me start by talking about my own belief and in fact the message that I have been trying to put across ever since I became Secretary-General. I think we all have to agree there has been excessive preoccupation with State security and I would like to switch that emphasis on State security to the security of individuals within the State, and this is where the issue of human rights and the rule of law and good governance comes in. So this is where I stand on that issue. When it comes to the question of what prevails, the domestic or the international, I would say that they reinforce each other, but the domestic scene cannot be ignored, particularly when it comes to dealing with local issues. I would also be hesitant about prejudging what Prime-Minister-elect Barak may do or not do. Obviously he is trying to build a very broad coalition. I had the opportunity of speaking to him after the election and he did assure me that peace would be very high on his agenda and I presume he's trying to put together a large coalition to be able to move ahead on some of the peace process issues, which is an external issue, but also have enough depth of support within the Government and the Knesset to be able to contain some of the domestic developments as well. So I would hope that once he has put together his cabinet and taken over fully he

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Ehud Barak

will move on the peace process. Obviously he will have to make compromises with some of the people in his party, but I think he is determined to go ahead and I think the exchange of messages between him and President Assad and what they said about each other I hope is a good omen. And I think we should give him a chance.

*Bashar Al-Assad
President of Syria*

Q: Does the Secretary-General think that the United States and the British Government would have been better advised to seek the approval of the UN before going to war over Kosovo (applause)

SG: I see the audience has voted (laughter)

*Kosovo
need force*

Q: Some of the audience

SG I take the point, some of the audience.

On the 24th March I did make a statement when the air-action began. I stated then and I repeat it now, that there may be times when it becomes necessary to use force in pursuit of peace, but the Security Council which has primary responsibility for peace and security must be involved in that decision and NATO's own charter concedes that point. However, in this situation, we were faced with 2 competing priorities: the need to respect international law and the charter and the need to do something about a compelling humanitarian situation. I was, as Secretary-General, concerned that by giving preference to the latter, one could set a precedent which would encourage other groups and other governments who do not have a strong case, to resort to use of force without reference to the Council. What

was also a bit awkward in this particular case is that Nato, which resorted to use of force without specific approval or authorization by the Council, also had three Permanent Members in Nato and when an organization with three permanent members ignores the Council and nothing is done about it, what authority, moral or legal, will they have to go and lecture other groups or other regional organizations. But I think things have ended up well in the sense that they did come to the Security Council to seek authorization to deploy troops to establish an interim administration and I think that, in a way, underscores the primacy of the Security Council on issues of peace and security. It is the only legitimate body that can provide legal basis for that kind of deployment. So in a way we have admitted that sooner or later we need the Security Council and I hope in future it will be sooner rather than later. Thank you (applause)

VN Security Council/NATO

Q: In the world today we see religion has assumed less and less importance in the lives of people in the West and in another context religion seems to be turning away from the spiritual values that are at the heart of our great traditions I would like to ask what effect you feel this moving away from spirituality has upon the dialogue between civilizations.

Religion and conflict
religion and duty

SG I think each individual has to decide the issue of religion for himself. Personally I believe that one cannot ignore the spiritual side of life, and I said in the past that one cannot underestimate the power of prayer and the lessons that religion teaches us and I cited some others in my statement earlier this morning. But having said that I think I would leave it to each individual to make their choice and to live their life as they see fit.

Q: Human-kind is wholly resistant to this idea of changing, integration, and harmony as we try to merge into a multi-racial, non-racist society. Now Christian ethic fails us in a number of different ways... can you tell us briefly, Secretary-General, how Islamic thought and practice can bring about this rich and highly-desired idea to promote a new humanity as we approach the millennium.

SG: I think in my talk I did indicate we should respect diversity and there should be free exchange of views and one should be free to express oneself. I think with the sort of dialogue and exchange that I have referred to within societies, and what the Moslems of this society bring to this society and the table, if we were to be open and to share and learn from each other, I think the Moslem community here and their faith and traditions will add to the dynamism of this society as it has to other societies. I think this openness and the dialogue of civilizations that even leaders like (President) Khatami is calling for is what we need. I'm not talking about assimilation, I'm talking of respecting the groups and respecting their traditions and accepting diversity and treating each individual as your equal.

Mohammad
Khatami

Q: We are delighted to hear that the UN has declared the year 2001 the UN Year of Dialogue amongst Civilizations and I think that Professor Huntingdon at least left his mark in some way. But we've had various UN years on different themes and it doesn't always have as much substance or results as one would wish. What preparations could one make or how do you hope to see this year really implemented, so that it really does have some substance and lead to genuine dialogue?

The UN
Year of
Dialogue amongst
Civilizations

Samuel Phillips
Huntington

SG: I hope I did not create the impression that one should dismiss Professor Huntington, in fact we had a Security Council retreat in upstate New York and he was one of the speakers who came speak to us. And so we are practising the dialogue we are talking about. Let me say that I think there is going to be a series of events and discussions beginning even now leading up to the year 2001 and I think when I am often asked this question that the UN had held many conferences and what are the concrete results; the results may not be tangible, but if we are able to introduce ideas, if we are able to change the attitudes of people, if we are able to open their minds, to get them to embrace other ideas and respect what is sacred to others and deal with each other as equal human beings, that in itself is important. If we are able to bring different groups, different religious leaders and others, together to talk and discuss and have dialogue and go back to their own communities and share what they have learned, I think that in itself is important. When you look at the series of UN conferences over the past 25 years or so, from environment to sustainable development, women's issues, population to economic and social development, we put a whole agenda on the table which some Governments are pulling through very, very systematically. I was surprised to see in China, for example, that they have analysed the results of each of these conferences, from population to women's issues, to environment and are trying to factor into their national plan and passing it down to the local and regional levels. So depending upon how you use the results one can get a lot out of these conferences, and besides, we've got the world thinking of environment, we've got the world thinking of sustainable development, we've made the world aware of the importance of demographics and the impact of development and so I think

*China and
conferences*

we do give a lot at these conferences. It may not be tangible, but it is real.
Thank you very much.

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