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**SPECIAL SESSION ON TOLERANCE AND RESPECT: 57TH SESSION
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Thank you Mr. Chairperson for giving me the floor.

I am speaking on behalf of the International Federation of University Women, Zonta International, International Council of Women, Brahma Kumaris Spiritual University, Soroptimist International and as President of the Geneva-based NGO Committee on the Status of Women.

Fundamental to the principle of tolerance is first of all understanding and acceptance – understanding why there are differences in human beings. These differences are primarily biological and physical as in sex and age; anthropological as in ethnicity, cultures and traditions; sociological as gender, group or community relations, including religious and political; and economic well-being. Without exception, each phenomenon is unequal to begin with. It evolves from the influence of the world that surrounds us. In the past, social relations have been limited within the boundaries of one's country or region. Today, we have entered a new era of a global knowledge-based society. Information and communications technology can now transcend any barrier and this development is irreversible and poses a formidable challenge on the lives of every individual person. It also is an opportunity as an equalizer for it is anonymous and hence does not discriminate in principle. But it has created a digital divide.

Yet, while we have all the tools to develop knowledge and understanding, we have not harnessed these to cope with diversities and in fact are exacerbating exclusion and rigidity in our prejudices. Internal and external wars are being waged in the name of religion or ethnicity; violence is targeting the vulnerable, especially women, children and the elderly. We have not transformed our minds to adapt to and respect diversity. Our minds are still set on the rules of hierarchy and the quest for economic and political power as essential to “good living.” And the media is there to forge sensationalism and the general public is acquiescent.

It is time for us to find the missing link – that not only tolerates diversity but fosters respect for the dignity of every human being as equal. First, our understanding must not only extend out to the changing world around us but all must reach inwards to the inner self, so that we can develop and grow as whole human beings. Secondly, human rights education is a key

that would provide a new vision towards what is ethical, moral and socially responsible – the rule of law with a human face and spirit. Education per se is not only about teaching, it should nurture intellectual development and depth of character and guide our instinctive and spontaneous behaviour so that virtues such as respect, responsibility, love, honesty, tolerance and cooperation are moulded into our very being.

Government and the media have a role to play to create a climate of non-violence that promotes pluri-cultural societies and economic empowerment. Thirdly, we should consider that gender inequality further compounds racial discrimination. It is a classification of disparities that are often not reducible to differences in income or resources but to many other spheres of differential benefits, e.g. in the division of labour within the household; in the extent of care or education received; in liberties and ownership that different members are permitted to enjoy, in terms of the many social functionings and capabilities, leadership positions, etc. Finally, social development is a human right that must go hand in hand with economic considerations and transactions.

Lastly, Mr. Chairperson, I would like to call our attention to what Mr. Giandominico Picco, the personal representative of the Secretary-General, said following the launch of the 2001 International Year of Dialogue Among Civilisations, that we should set our minds away from the negative waves of hatred and urge to kill and punish. We must concentrate on positive thoughts of peace, harmony and life. I hope that the result of the study of Mr. Picco and his team of sages will positively contribute to the holistic approach to the forthcoming World Conference Against Racism, Xenophobia, Racial Discrimination and all forms of Related Intolerance.

Thank you.
