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**SPEECH BY FORMER PRESIDENT
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THE SEMINAR OF THE OLSO CENTRE
HOTEL CONTINENTAL
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PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE AND RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE

President Walesa, Ms Tibaijuka, Minister Mohammed Al Mutawa, Your Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen.

I welcome this opportunity to share my views on the importance of peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance with this distinguished audience. I would also like to commend the Oslo Centre and the Foundation for Dialogue and Peace for the role that they have played in organising this event.

It is appropriate for us to consider questions related to peace in Oslo, the home of the Nobel Peace Prize. Despite continuing conflicts in several parts of the world there is good reason to believe that mankind's age-old search for peace is at last beginning to achieve some success. Indeed, according to Steven Pinker "we may be living in the most peaceful time in our species' existence".

Studies have shown that there has, over the past few millennia, been a steady decline in the percentage of people who have died as a result of conflict. During World War II there were 200 conflict-related deaths per 100 000, compared to fewer than one conflict-related death per 100 000 now.

There are a number of reasons for this significant decline:

- There have been no conflicts between major powers - perhaps because of growing realisation of the catastrophic consequences of modern war;
- More states are now democracies - and history has shown that wars between democracies are very rare;
- Higher levels of global trade and economic interdependence have also made states reluctant to incur the economic costs of conflict;
- Because of higher levels of literacy and education now, populations are more likely to understand and avoid the inevitable cost - in lives and wealth - of conflict.

Another important factor is that virtually all conflicts are now within states, between religious, linguistic and political factions - and are no longer between states. None of the four major conflicts in the world today, involving more than 10 000 fatalities in 2018 - are between countries: three of them - the conflicts in Afghanistan, Syria and Yemen - are



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conflicts between internal religious and political factions that have been internationalised. The fourth serious conflict in 2018 was the ongoing drug war in Mexico.

Despite declining fatalities, the number of conflicts within states between religious, ethnic and political factions is increasing.

Nearly all the world's conflicts now have their roots in the inability of countries to manage religious and cultural diversity. Examples in recent decades include the civil war in Sri Lanka between Tamils and Sri Lankans; the ongoing tensions between Jews and Muslims in Israel/Palestine; conflicts involving the Kurdish minorities in Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran; continuing ethnic warfare in South Sudan and Darfur; recent conflicts in the Ivory Coast and Mali; recurrent tensions between Muslims and Christians in Nigeria. Chechnya, Dagestan, Georgia, Kashmir and the Philippines have recently - or are still - experiencing ethnic or religious conflicts. The current civil war in Syria is being seriously exacerbated by long-standing tensions between fundamentalists, Shi'ites, Alawites, Kurds and Christians.

Many of these conflicts have their roots in religious intolerance. Too often, the advancement of fanatical religious agendas is simply a cover for the promotion of ulterior political interests. As we have seen throughout history, conflicts based on religious differences are often among the most bitter and implacable. This is, perhaps, because in such conflicts, enemies are seen in absolute terms - not simply as foes - but as evil.

Friction between religious and cultural communities is likely to increase in coming years because of dramatic shifts that are taking place in global demographics.

One of the inescapable implications of globalisation is an enormous increase in the interaction between people from different backgrounds, cultures, languages and religions. The management of the resulting cultural, language and religious diversity will be one of this century's greatest challenges.

Throughout the world populations are becoming more cosmopolitan: the world's 200 countries now include more than 6 000 different cultural communities. More than 130 countries have cultural minorities comprising more than 10% of their populations.

As you in Europe know all too well, cultural diversity is being augmented by new waves of migrants seeking economic opportunities and freedom. Everywhere people are on the move - and everywhere they are confronting once homogenous societies with new challenges.

The inability of countries to manage diversity has now become by far the greatest source of conflict in the world.

The accommodation of diverse immigrant groups has become one of the most controversial issues in Europe. It has played a decisive role in recent elections in a number of European countries. It has led to ugly reaction and riots and was a major factor in the British decision



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three years ago to leave the European Union. For southern European countries the arrival of indeterminate numbers of refugees is creating unsustainable human and logistic problems.

The European Union is confronted by the challenge of striking a balance between core humanitarian values and political reaction. It must also take into consideration the need to facilitate the immigration of sorely-needed skilled and unskilled workers - necessitated by the expected decline of its work force by 20 million people by 2030.

Immigration and demographics also played a central role in the 2016 election of President Donald Trump. Trump supporters fear that the traditional European-descended dominance of the United States is under threat from changing demographics - and particularly from the emergence of Hispanic Americans as the country's largest ethnic minority. Hispanics will include more than 100 million people - or one in four Americans - by 2050. Already they make up more than a third of the populations of Texas and California and more than 40% of the population of New Mexico. But should they accept the convention that all migrants should eventually become English-speaking - or will the United States increasingly have to accept bilingualism and multi-lingualism?

These are all core questions for the 21st Century.

South Africa - which is one of the most multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic societies in the world - has plenty of experience in managing - and mismanaging - diversity. Our population comprises:

- 80% black South Africans with nine ethnic groups - each speaking its own language - but increasingly conversant in English;
- 9% Coloured South Africans - most of whom still speak Afrikaans - but who also include a strong Muslim community descended from Indonesians who were brought to the Cape by the Dutch East India Company;
- 2% Indian South Africans - including Muslims and Hindus - most of whom speak English as their home language;
- 9% white South Africans - including my own community, the Afrikaners, who speak Afrikaans, and white English-speaking South Africans.

Our population also includes anywhere between two and five million refugees from the rest of Africa - most of whom are illegally in the country.

As we in South Africa have discovered, the answer to diversity is not secession, partition and devising ways to enable communities to live apart. It is to adopt approaches and to establish norms that will enable different cultural and ethnic communities to live together peacefully and in mutual respect within the same states. To achieve this, we must reach broad agreement on the cultural, linguistic and educational rights that such communities should enjoy. We need to do much more to define and protect the rights of cultural, ethnic and religious minorities throughout the world:



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- We need to strengthen the international norms for these rights, just as we have already done for individuals, for women and for children.
- We need to promote acceptance of the role that education can and must play in the preservation of religious, cultural and language diversity. We also need to establish the principle that states have a duty to support and finance such education.
- We need to measure the behaviour of governments against these norms. If we do so, I am confident that we will soon discover that the societies that are the worst afflicted by inter-communal violence are also those that have the least respect for the rights of their constituent communities.
- We need to develop overarching common values based on toleration and respect for all fundamental rights.

Above all, we need to practise toleration. We must welcome religious and cultural diversity. We must respect those who differ from us. The roots of prejudice are fear and ignorance. The solution is, on the one hand, to ensure that all our religious and cultural communities feel secure - and on the other to educate people about the cultures and religions of others.

During my visit to Bahrain last year I was impressed by the manner in which Bahrainis are succeeding in building a tolerant society. I was impressed by the presence in Manama of Sunni and Shia mosques alongside Christian churches and a Jewish synagogue. I was also impressed by the manner in which Bahrain is using its education system to combat prejudice and to reinforce toleration. Bahrain - under the leadership of Prime Minister Khalifa bin Khalifa - has also set an example by the manner in which it has settled international disputes by peaceful means and international arbitration.

The world has, indeed, become a more peaceful place. But there cannot be any room for complacency as long as states maintain arsenals of more than 14 000 nuclear weapons - with the combined ability to obliterate human civilization many times over. We South Africans discovered at the beginning of the 1990s that true security does not lie in weapons of mass destruction - but in resolving the problems and injustices that were the true cause of our insecurity in the first place.

Neither can there be any room for complacency for as long as some of the most powerful countries in the world continue to believe that they can promote their national interest through military power. Whatever the professed justification may be, the US invasion of Iraq in 2002 and military involvement in Afghanistan have been unmitigated catastrophes. They have led not only to two of the four major conflicts that continue to afflict the world - but have also cost the United States five trillion dollars - more than enough to replace and repair its aging infrastructure. The projection of Russian power in Ukraine and China's territorial claims in the South China Sea are also matters of the deepest concern.

However, the most serious challenge to peace in the coming decades will be the challenge of promoting religious and cultural toleration in a world where diversity will be the norm and not the exception.



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We have entered the global village. It is exciting; it is often very confusing; and sometimes a little frightening. Increasingly, people from different cultural backgrounds will be rubbing shoulders in the streets, market places and international companies that make up our global village. The presence of people from so many different cultures and religions is one of the most enriching aspects of our new world. But it will also require us to observe new codes of behaviour and to respect the multi-dimensional cultural, religious and linguistic identities and rights of people.