

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

--

**MESSAGE FOR LAUNCH OF THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR
FOR THE RAPPROCHEMENT OF CULTURES****Paris, 18 February 2010**

The International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures is an important initiative. During the year, we will be celebrating cultural diversity and showing how intercultural dialogue and understanding are essential for a more peaceful world. We will also be highlighting the crucial role of culture in development.

Recent years have given rise to exciting new avenues for promoting mutual understanding and respect -- but also to new challenges and tests. Globalization, for example, is bringing people together in ways that were unimaginable when the UN was created. Through migration, media, trade and, of course, the Internet, millions of people around the world are coming into daily contact as never before.

But our world is also beset by prejudice, hatred and unresolved challenges. Often, the same tools of contact become vehicles for divisiveness and incitement. Often, extremists demonize other cultures and traditions, and target them for violence. And at this time of economic turmoil, when there are fewer jobs to go around, people often blame minorities.

This International Year is thus very timely. In asking UNESCO to lead it, the United Nations General Assembly wanted to capitalize on the ample and successful experiences of UNESCO in fostering international cooperation through education, the sciences, culture and communication. I also welcome the creation of the High-Level Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures that is also being launched today, and look forward to the recommendations its members will offer on strengthening dialogue and our efforts to live in harmony.

The UN system is strongly committed to bringing cultures and peoples closer together, including through the UN Alliance of Civilizations and its wide network of grass-roots organizations. Let us work together to make the Year a resounding success.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ban Ki-moon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ban" being the most prominent.

BAN Ki-moon