



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Meeting of the GoF Focal Points

April 8, 2009

Summary Report

President Sampaio welcomes participants and thanks them for their participation in the Meeting of the Focal Points, the second of its sort after the inaugural session held in Paris in October 2008. President Sampaio shares with Focal Points his impression and evaluation about the Istanbul Forum and expresses his great satisfaction about the quality of debates, the impressive audience and participation and the extraordinary hospitality of the Turkish Government. The Forum confirms the important role played by the Alliance as a unique platform on intercultural dialogue, cooperation, bringing together governments, civil society, media, philanthropists and private sector, and facilitating collaboration and joint action among all actors.

Several members of the High level Group share their own perspective on the Istanbul Forum and the lessons of the first two editions to prepare the next Forum to be held in Brazil in May 2010. Their comments and interrogations notably touched upon the following points: the size and scope of the event, the diversity of themes in the program, the time and opportunities for networking, the globalization of the Alliance and the further expansion of its international outreach, the need for stronger women's participation, the limits to what individual participants can learn and contribute to.

After departure of President Sampaio, Marc Scheuer, Director of the UN AoC Secretariat, chairs the discussion which consists mostly in an open and informal exchange on how to structure the work of the Focal Points and to strengthen collaboration between the Secretariat and the Focal Points. During the past few months, the Secretariat has launched a newsletter, started weekly one-on-one teleconferences with Focal Points and provided a template for a National Strategy.

All participants welcomed the second meeting, which many felt overdue, insisting that there should be at least two meetings each year, if substantive work and real progress are expected. A number of Focal Points described challenges of their work and discussed centrality and limits of the FP's role: providing overall coherence, organizing the information flows, acting as relays, identifying the right interlocutors in complex administrative structures, promoting the exchange of experiences with other countries. Several stressed that their work would be almost impossible without the benefit of the AoC brand. There was a clear need to learn from each other and to reflect together on the political dimension and basis of the intercultural work in our societies. Several participants presented the main features of recently adopted national strategies in their respective countries.

While there was much reference to the twin challenges of widening and deepening, this was not generally seen as too problematic. As the Alliance itself kept widening, some felt that focal points had a particular responsibility in ensuring a deepening, whenever possible and appropriate. The opportunities offered by existing channels or at least inclination for regional cooperation and the creation of affinity groups and cooperation platforms, as suggested by Switzerland in the Group of Friends, attracted particular attention and debate. Flexible forms of cooperation were indeed needed, in order to take care of a great variety of situations, both in terms of issues and in terms of resources and capacity to address them.

There was a general pleasure about the wealth of ideas put on the table, both during the Forum proper and the FP meeting, and a real enthusiasm to build on that wealth, with some participants cautioning about too much excitement and reminding about the constraints.

At risk of being unfair towards other ideas and participants, a selection of the following points made is probably a good illustration of the debate:

- Swiss proposes the creation of thematic groups that would bring countries sharing specific interest who would work together. It is proposed to start with one group on Fostering Cross-Cultural humanitarian action and one group on Media Literacy;
- Korea expresses its interest in working at the regional level and to link up the work done with regional institutions;
- Spain insists on the need for all members of the Group of Friends to share the financial burden and to contribute financially to the AoC Trust Fund;
- Argentina expresses its concern on the dilemma between widening and deepening the scope and activities of the Alliance, and stresses the need to consolidate the community of Focal Points;
- UCLG stresses the need to enhance cross fertilization between the four sectors of the Alliance;
- New Zealand shares its experience of organizing a seminar on Medias involving other countries in the region;
- France is wondering if National Strategy should reflect and compile what is already done at the country level and expresses its concerns about the heaviness of inter-ministerial process;
- Algeria is reflecting on the widening/deepening dilemma and proposes an element of response saying that widening is the responsibility of the High Representative and the UN AoC Secretariat and deepening is the responsibility of the Focal Points;
- Hungary presents the initiative of the CoE of intercultural cities and suggests to connect with it;
- UNESCO recommends 1/ that no new project should be undertaken before doing previously the state of the art; 2/ to develop arborescence of projects rather than multiplication; 3/ recall that 2010 will be the UN Year of rapprochement of cultures;
- OIC suggests to do a systematic mapping of NGOs engaged in intercultural dialogue and cooperation;
- Brazil feels that it is difficult to summarize all the achievements and outcome of the Forum and what the results are.

A few points emerge from the discussion as key orientations:

- There is an interest to create thematic platforms but their impact and sustainability requires that "champions" countries take a lead. It was noted that Switzerland would probably take a first initiative soon, that transparency would be important and that rules of engagement would progressively emerge from the practice, in some appropriate consultation with the High Representative;

- Altogether AoC and FPs have the responsibility to generate a debate on the challenges of intercultural dialogue and cooperation and to raise public awareness on the good governance of diversity;
- Obviously, the difference and impact of the AoC can be made at the local level by encouraging and supporting local initiatives and facilitating their replication and scale up;
- One other major task of the AoC is to connect innovative initiatives, actors, potential donors, policy makers, researchers, private sector and the media and to build up synergies and complementarily among them in engaging them to work across boundaries. In that respect, the Istanbul Forum has been very successful with an impressive participation of a wide range of actors from many horizons.