

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS AT MINISTERIAL MEETING
ON THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS
New York, 26 September 2009**

Distinguished ministers,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

This has been a very productive week at the United Nations. I count this ministerial meeting as one of our most important events during that time.

I am pleased to welcome you, and even more pleased to see more members in this Group than ever before. The Alliance is growing in both size and influence. That bodes well for our ability to counter the dangerous forces of polarization that threaten our world.

I am grateful to all of you for expanding the Alliance across countries and regions.

You are building trust among diverse cultures. Supporting reconciliation. Reducing tensions between communities.

We in this room have long understood that this effort is central to foreign policy... that it is essential to diplomacy... and that it helps to lay the foundation for lasting peace.

We know that where there is conflict, we need more than signed peace accords, we need trust... the kind of trust the Alliance is fostering.

But the Alliance is much more than a tool for helping countries and regions torn apart by conflicts. It has a growing role to play in soothing tensions caused by economic inequality.

This is all the more important as the world copes with a global economic crisis. The international response is rightly focused on economic measures. It is important to help markets. But we also have to help struggling people. And that includes promoting tolerance.

The painful truth is that when there are fewer jobs to go around, people often blame minorities. Although no one group caused the current crisis, we are seeing a backlash against many cultural and religious minorities.

This is particularly true for migrant workers.

The Alliance is working to respond. Two days from now, it will organize a roundtable on how to better integrate migrants into society.

I also welcome the Alliance's upcoming video festival on migration and diversity. I understand that youth from around the world have been sending in short videos reflecting their thoughts and ideas on these complex issues.

I look forward to the results of these valuable initiatives.

The Alliance is demonstrating its dynamism in other ways, too.

Its new projects include a fellowship programme for emerging leaders from the Muslim world and the West. Here too, the Alliance is creating far-reaching partnerships - bringing together the British Council, the League of Arab States, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and the German Marshall Fund.

The Alliance's Rapid Response Media Mechanism is broadening the debate.

The Alliance is setting up a clearinghouse on education about religions and beliefs.

It is working with the Anna Lindh Foundation to restore trust following the Gaza crisis.

And it is collaborating with the UN Global Compact to launch a Corporate Sector Network, with the support of Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan.

Excellencies,

The Alliance is helping us to get through these troubled times. I thank the High Representative, President Sampaio, and you, this initiative's invaluable friends.

Another friend of the Alliance, Enrique Iglesias, the Secretary-General of the Ibero-American Secretariat, has said that the current economic crisis offers a chance to transform our world. I agree. As he said, we have the possibility for "not only a new paradigm of economic development, but also a set of basic principles – dialogue, understanding and tolerance – which are embodied in the Alliance of Civilizations".

I look forward to working closely with all of you to promote these principles around the world. I thank you for your support, and I count on your continued engagement as we prepare for the next Alliance Forum, next year in Rio de Janeiro.

Let us continue developing the very concrete initiatives that are giving meaning to the Alliance's lofty aims. By doing that, we can help improve relations – neighbour to neighbour, community to community and country to country.

Thank you.