

UNITED NATIONS



NATIONS UNIES

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS TO THE SECOND FORUM  
OF THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS  
Istanbul, 6 April 2009**

Prime Minister [Recep Tayyip] Erdoğan,  
President of the Government [José Luis] Rodríguez Zapatero,  
High Representative [Jorge] Sampaio,  
Distinguished heads of State and Government,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is exciting to be here. To look out at all of you, is to see a very powerful coalition for progress.

Diplomats, Presidents, Prime Ministers, and religious leaders.

Scholars and CEOs.

Young people and civil society leaders.

All of you working together under the very great, inclusive, cross-cultural umbrella of the Alliance of Civilizations.

I welcome you and I salute your forward-thinking participation.

I especially want to thank Prime Minister Erdoğan and President of the Government Rodríguez Zapatero for their outstanding leadership of the Alliance, as well as my High Representative, President Sampaio, who has personally done so much for the cause of mutual understanding throughout the world.

Just over two years ago, here in Istanbul, the Alliance's High-Level Group launched its landmark report.

Among its insights and analysis was this fundamental point: "All societies are bound together in their humanity and interdependent in their quest for stability, prosperity and peaceful co-existence".

That point must always be our touchstone. But it is especially important now, as the world struggles with multiple crises.

Economic and financial turmoil are tearing at the fabric of societies. Too many people are jobless, hungry and angry. Many are looking for scapegoats. They blame the Other. The Other community. The Other religion. The Other faith. The Other group.

This is extremely dangerous and even deadly. Unfair blame leads to unjust punishment. Even a child could be murdered on the excuse that it would only grow up to be “one of them”. We have been this way before, too many times.

All too often, the United Nations must deal with fires after they break out. Through the Alliance of Civilizations, we can stamp out the sparks before they catch. This is the real purpose and the real philosophy behind the Alliance of Civilizations.

This is critical, because no amount of blue helmets, ceasefires or human rights monitors can bring lasting peace without a genuine spirit of cooperation among different communities, different faiths, different groups.

So we urgently need the Alliance. The Alliance has struck a chord around the world. Now we need you to take it to the next level, to the grassroots.

You are here to meet and talk. More than that, you are signing new agreements, launching new networks, funding worthy projects. This is partnership in action.

Your efforts will do more than prevent problems. They will generate solutions.

Bridging divides helps keep the peace. It also gives the economy a boost by making societies more stable for investors. That is why the Alliance is working with the UN Global Compact to help corporations foster tolerance. Businesses know that in today’s globalized world, they have to be able to compete in multicultural environments.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Since the Alliance is built on powerful ideas, this would seem an appropriate occasion on which to share with you the words of a few modern thinkers.

One said, “The world changes, but tensions and stereotypes from the past remain. In order to shake up these preconceived notions, nothing works better than individuals meeting face to face.” This means dialogue.

Another observed that, “Wherever you come from, whoever you are, you strive for a better life, well-being and peace.”

Still another noted that people are linked by “the same day-to-day problems, the same challenges, the same desire to make progress towards a better world.”

Who are these three wise philosophers?

One is an organizer from the United States.

Another is a teacher from Algeria.

The third leads an indigenous women's organization in Chad, in Africa.

They are all young, and they all come together through an on-line magazine supported by the Alliance which lets their voices be heard.

That project and others like it are just one of many featured at this Forum's Marketplace of Ideas. I urge you to take advantage of this opportunity to learn about these initiatives, all of which are making a tangible difference in communities around the world.

I also commend to you several other Alliance initiatives. These include a set of online tools that are helping open young minds to other religious traditions. A Media Fund that is promoting mainstream films that challenge cultural stereotypes. A fellowship programme that helps young leaders create new models of collaboration. And a film festival on migration and integration.

The Alliance has also developed a Rapid Response Media Mechanism, which connects journalists with a wide range of international experts. When events and controversies threaten to split societies, the voices of these experts can help broaden the range of views being heard. Often, extremists and others seek to dominate the debate and stir the cauldron. And as we know, it is the most polarizing voices that are perceived to offer the most gripping viewing or listening experiences. At such times, our Alliance experts serve as invaluable moderating influences.

Friends,

Since our last Forum in Spain, two members of the Alliance's High-Level Group passed away. Although Mohamed Charfi, Tunisia's former Minister of Education, and Ali Alatas, Indonesia's former Foreign Minister, are no longer with us, I believe their legacy still endures.

Mr. Charfi once pointed out that, "For the great majority, we have the same principles. Politics and history have acted so that we have drifted apart, but in fact, we are very close."

And Mr. Alatas once said, "This is my fervent hope: that the Alliance of Civilizations will succeed in inspiring and persuading the rest of the international community to do [what is] urgently required to move to a more harmonious and peaceful world."

They knew, and we know, that today's world of strife is like a powder keg. In such a volatile environment, we need to do everything we can to keep differences, rivalries, hatred and ignorance from erupting into violence.

But even that, vital as it is, is not enough.

The explosive nature of our world is not only a product of communal tensions. The world is aboil with grave, unresolved challenges, from poverty and climate change to repression and injustice. Any one of these is cause enough for instability; we could well reach critical junctures on all at once. If we are to have any hope of addressing them, we need to be able to put our best feet forward.

The Alliance gives us a chance. A chance to consign identity-based divisiveness to the past – something we should have done long ago. A chance to recognize our common humanity before it is too late.

All of you assembled here come from diverse backgrounds and represent different interests. But you share the same spirit of good will. You share a conviction that what unites us is so basic, and so powerful, that it should easily overwhelm what divides us.

Spreading understanding of this fundamental truth is more critical than ever.

I look forward to continuing to work with you in that quest, for the sake of people everywhere who yearn for a world of coexistence and peace and harmonious relations.

Thank you. Tesekkür ederim.