



**THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILISATIONS HIGH-LEVEL SYMPOSIUM
AUCKLAND, MAY 2007**

**REPORT TO THE THIRD ASIA PACIFIC
REGIONAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE
WAITANGI, 29 – 31 MAY 2007**

The Alliance of Civilisations

The Alliance of Civilisations is a global effort to bridge divides between civilisations, co-sponsored by Spain and Turkey and launched by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2005. He appointed a High Level Group of twenty from a broad range of regions and backgrounds, including, from our region, distinguished former Foreign Minister Ali Alatas of Indonesia.

Their Report, issued in November 2006, is divided into two parts: the first focuses on the political factors underlying tension between societies, particularly in the Middle East, while the second focuses in on practical recommendations for action in four main fields of action:

- ensuring that **education** gives people an accurate picture of other peoples and cultures;
- giving **youth** more opportunities to understand people from other countries and societies;
- encouraging the **media** to avoid stereotyping and the overstating of conflict and disagreement; and
- developing **migration** policies which avoid creating either resentment or fear.

Within these themes the report provides recommendations for practical action involving states (at the national, regional and local levels), as well as international organisations and civil society.

The Auckland Symposium, 23-24 May 2007

New Zealand Prime Minister Helen Clark convened a High-level Symposium in Auckland last week to engage Ministers, community leaders and experts from our region and beyond on the Alliance of Civilisations initiative. This was the first regional meeting to be held in response to the High Level Group's Report. The Symposium was intended to seek initial views on the report's relevance for the Asia Pacific region, and to draw out those recommendations from the report on the Alliance "main fields of action", education, youth, migration and media, which have potential for implementation in our region. The Waitangi regional interfaith dialogue offers the first opportunity for a broader range of community leaders in our region to consider the outcomes of the Symposium.

New Zealand hopes to see the diverse societies of the Asia Pacific take full advantage of the opportunities offered by the Alliance of Civilisations initiative.

Themes of the Symposium

Discussion at the Auckland Symposium was wide ranging. The rapporteur reported that:

Participants rejected the notion of the inevitability of a "Clash of Civilisations" even though it was a useful starting point for discussion. They emphasised that many apparently "civilisational" or religious clashes are fundamentally political and driven by long-standing grievances and perceived injustices.

Many speakers noted that poverty was often linked to the spread of fanaticism even though there was not a direct causal relationship. There was a call for an "axis of equality" to address growing global imbalances.

Attention focussed on the need for dialogue and understanding, in particular between the West and the Muslim world, although a number of participants recognised the need to look at other civilisations and religions, given the diversity of the Asia Pacific region. In our region, as in others, relations between civilisations and religions are "based on centuries of constructive exchanges, cross-fertilisation, and peaceful coexistence."

Options for regional action

A wide range of ideas for action in the four main fields covered in the Report were canvassed. These included:

Education

- **Education about different religions – as opposed to instruction in a particular religion – should be included in school curricula.**
- **‘Best practice’ approaches to inter-cultural education should be disseminated around the region.**
- **Innovative cross-cultural educational projects should be piloted across the region.**
- **Non-classroom education such as community service should be encouraged as a means of learning more about other religions and cultures. Intra-faith learning experiences should also be encouraged.**
- **Seminary and faith training programmes should include content about other religions and be linked more closely to the broader teaching programmes of universities.**
- **Islamic Studies Centres in Western universities can be useful for better understanding of Islam and of national and regional Moslem communities.**
- **Education initiatives should include training for educators and the parents of students, as well as further vocational and business studies.**
- **A regional process could be explored to develop and review education curricula.**

Youth

- **Governments and civil society must explore new ways to deliver to young people the high degree of cultural and religious literacy needed to function successfully in a world of increasing religious and cultural diversity.**
- **Youth exchanges are a strongly positive force in building bridges between communities and should take place between and within countries. Exchanges should be two-way and involve students from different cultures within the Asia-Pacific region, including the Pacific Islands.**

- A “Colombo Plan” for intercultural exchange between students in the region would advance the aims of the Alliance of Civilisations.
- A “Global Youth Alliance”, as proposed by the High-level Group, should be developed, and regional youth networks should explore these issues.
- New youth networks should take advantage of modern technological tools such as the internet.

Media

- Journalists should be given more opportunities, including formal training, to ensure accuracy in their reporting of intercultural and inter-religious issues.
- Media owners should be included in discussions about media standards, responsibility and accountabilities.
- Education in media studies and interpretation should become an integral part of school learning, so that young people develop a more sophisticated and critical understanding of the media.

Migration

- Humane migration systems are essential, and can be improved by better exchanges of information between governments, and clear and transparent procedures.
- Further research is needed on migrant integration into local communities.
- Human rights education should be made available to migrants themselves and in public education programmes.

Future directions

Participants in the Auckland Symposium made the following observations and recommendations about future directions of the AOC:

- 1. There was broad agreement that our region faced home grown issues of tension between societies and that the Alliance of Civilisations should be welcomed as providing useful options to address these.**
- 2. Increasing support and developing a practical action programme are vital if the objectives of the AOC initiative are to be realised in the Asia Pacific region.**
- 3. Other questions still to be resolved include: What forums (ASEAN, East Asia Summit, APEC) will be used to carry the initiative forward? How will governments engage civil society and the private sector on the AOC recommendations? How should countries in the region respond to the AOC Report and recommendations?**

Alliance of Civilisations information

Further information and updates on the Alliance, including on its implementation plan, and the first Alliance of Civilisations Forum to be held in Spain at the end of this year, are available at www.unaoc.org.

The full report of the Auckland Symposium will be available on the New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, www.mfat.govt.nz, shortly.