

Statement by
Dr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the 62nd Session
of the United Nations General Assembly
at the Ministerial Meeting of Group of Friends of the
Alliance of Civilizations

New York, 26 September 2007

Mr. Secretary-General,
Mr. High-Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations,
Excellencies,
Esteemed Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations,

I am honored to address this meeting of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations. It is encouraging that there are so many distinguished representatives at the meeting today. This is a demonstration of the political importance that Member States and international organizations ascribe to intercultural tolerance and mutual understanding. Today's meeting also reflects the growing role of the United Nations as the nexus for addressing these issues.

I would like to commend the Alliance of Civilizations and its High-Representative Mr. Jorge Sampaio for the work it has done so far and for preparing the Implementation Plan with concrete measures for promoting dialogue between nations, cultures, and communities. I would also like to commend the leading contributions made by Spain and Turkey, the co-sponsors of the Alliance. Both countries have a rich cultural diversity and history. The first Annual Forum of the Alliance will be hosted by Spain in January next year. This is another important opportunity to take our work forward.

I myself come from a country that lies at a crossroads of different cultures and religions. From my house in the countryside I can see on one side an orthodox monastery. When I look to the other side, I see a mosque. I thus know from my personal experience how important it is that there be understanding between cultures, and that this understanding be enacted through dialogue on daily basis.

Currently, there are several initiatives being undertaken by the UN towards better cross-cultural understanding. Under the auspices of the General Assembly, the thematic debate on "Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace" was held earlier this year, and there is a High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace coming up in early October.

The Alliance of Civilizations has a special place in these collective efforts. Progress in the Alliances' four major priority areas -- **youth, education, media, and migration** -- is indispensable for reducing the tensions and polarizations between societies which differ in their religious and cultural values. How better to enhance the dialogue on a daily basis but through properly sensitized media; How better to take forward mutual understanding but through the positive experiences resulting from increasingly direct encounters between people of diverse cultures; How better to promote cross-cultural dialogue in the long run but through youth and education.

The result-oriented initiative and its concrete projects deserve our full support. During the 62nd session I will do my best to promote the work of the Alliance of Civilizations; its friends and partners.

I wish you a very fruitful meeting. Thank you.