

**THE SECRETARY-GENERAL**

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**REMARKS TO ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS
GROUP OF FRIENDS MINISTERIAL MEETING
New York, 26 September 2007**

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear friends,

Good morning, and welcome to the second Alliance of Civilizations Group of Friends Ministerial meeting.

I am delighted that so many of you have joined us today. I am pleased to see how your ranks have grown since the inaugural ministerial meeting last September. Your Group has nearly doubled. This represents a strong vote of confidence in the agenda of the Alliance of Civilizations, and signals your resolve to contribute towards its success.

Excellencies,

Your support is needed now more than ever. Across the world, intolerance and cross-cultural tensions are on the rise. Every day serves up new instances of the harmful impact cultural misunderstandings and religious prejudices can have on relations between communities, both within countries and across national borders. Indeed, many of today's global challenges – though mostly political in nature – are aggravated and rendered intractable by the distrust, even hostility, among different cultural and religious groups.

Facing these challenges is the need of the hour. It demands a collective and broad-based approach that is at the very heart of the Alliance of Civilizations. I believe that this initiative can help build bridges at three different levels:

First, the national perspective. The Alliance is well-positioned to support initiatives aimed at improving cross-cultural relations. In areas like education, media and the youth, it can help foster partnerships among governments, international organizations, civil society groups and foundations. By drawing on its networks and expertise, it can bolster grassroots efforts to combat prejudice and promote dialogue among diverse communities.

Second, at the inter-governmental level, the Alliance of Civilizations can serve as a catalyst for joint action. For example, the Group of Friends initiative offers a shared platform to member countries to explore new ways to cooperate on healing cultural divides. Addressing such issues requires not only that countries work together, but that they be seen working together. The partnership between Spain and Turkey that led to the Alliance of Civilizations is, in itself, a potent symbol of what dialogue can achieve when backed by strong political will.

Finally, the Alliance can help reinforce the work of the United Nations system as a whole. The UN's primary task is to prevent war and promote peace, and the Alliance of

Civilizations is poised to make a real contribution to this effort. Its initiatives to reduce polarization between cultures and societies and create space for cultural dialogue and exchanges are meant to lay the foundations for a lasting peace. A peace based not on military parity or uneasy ceasefires, but on genuine tolerance and mutual understanding.

Success on each of these fronts will not come easily. Promoting tolerance in today's poisoned atmosphere is, unfortunately, a lengthy and demanding task. But it is also a necessary and unavoidable challenge.

Excellencies,

Looking around this room today, I feel it is a challenge that you are all determined to take on, and to overcome. That is why I am confident that, by working together, we can create conditions that help communities choose the path of dialogue instead of confrontation; we can learn to engage with each other rather than ignore each other; and we can embrace our diversity instead of fearing it.

In that spirit, let me wish all of you a most productive session.

Thank you.