

*Check against delivery*



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Jorge Sampaio

UN HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR  
THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

**OPENING SESSION**

**Second Forum of the Alliance**

*Istanbul,*

*April 6, 2009*

Mister Prime Minister of Turkey

Mister Secretary-General of the United Nations

Mister President of the Government of Spain

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Friends of the Alliance

- I want to express my deep satisfaction that we are gathered here today at this Second Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations.
- When we set out in January 2008 we knew that the road from Madrid to Istanbul would not be a straight line.
- In fact, we were well aware that it would travel through remote places, across oceans and continents in order to bring peoples and cultures from the whole world to Istanbul.
- It was a path with some calculated and other unexpected risks, occasional surprises and known difficulties, but we firmly pursued the direction outlined in Madrid.
- Dear Friends, our journey to Istanbul, we made it!

- Therefore I wish, naturally, to thank all those whose strength of conviction, determined action and firm commitment made this journey possible.
  
- I would like to express my gratitude and my appreciation to the United Nations Secretary-General, to the Governments of Turkey and Spain, co-sponsors of the Alliance, but also to its increasingly numerous and committed Group of Friends, as well as the great and diverse community of partners in civil society, the network of national coordinators and focal points of the Alliance and its Goodwill Ambassadors, former members of the High Level Group, and also the Secretariat.
  
- Finally, I would like to say a special word of thanks to our hosts for their generous and outstanding hospitality but also, of course, for their contribution to the realization of the Alliance's goals.

Dear Friends,

- What the Alliance brings here to Istanbul is your work. What it will share with you today is due to your efforts and your strong commitment to respond to the heavy challenges confronting us with the indefectible weapons of cooperation and dialogue.
  
- More cooperation and better dialogue, that is exactly what we need if we wish to get through the complex global crisis in which we are living.

- Thanks to our dialogue-based and consensus-building loose approach, we have been able to preserve our capacity for attraction, to remain united and to deliver.
- From Madrid to Istanbul we have enlarged the Group of Friends from 40 to more than double that. Yes, imagine, Cape Verde, our latest newcomer, is member number one hundred!
- We will also be signing another important set of cooperation instruments with key organizations in addition to the important network of partnerships already established. All together, these new agreements will enable us to consolidate our platform of collaboration, benefit from the expertise of our partners in their own fields of competence, and develop joint initiatives.
- In times of crisis such as these it is important to encourage a more cooperative attitude within the organisations of the international community, better sharing of resources and skills and above all, avoid useless duplications and redundancies.
- The Alliance is not intended to stand in for specialised bodies and organisations, it merely aims to serve as a platform of dialogue that delivers.

- Moreover, during these two days we will also show how the more emblematic projects of the Madrid Forum travelled with us to Istanbul, how they developed and deepened. But there is more - today and tomorrow a number of new initiatives under the Alliance umbrella will be launched. These will enrich our future agenda when after Istanbul, we again set off on our travels.
  
- It is the case of the Dialogue Café, the case of the Alliance Fellowship Program or of “Plural+”. I could go on and give you more examples but it is a long list. Let me add only another example, one which is a cluster of Euro-Mediterranean projects, led by the Alliance and the Anna Lindh Foundation, to be developed by a number of partners, aimed at restoring trust and rebuilding bridges in that region in the wake of the Gaza crisis.
  
- To cut a long story short, let me emphasize that this second Forum of the Alliance clearly highlights its role as a global matchmaker. It connects innovative, groundbreaking grassroots initiatives with international organizations, potential funders and policymakers who together can help scale up these projects and give them global prominence.

Dear Friends,

- I would not like my words to sound as if everything has been easy and that the positive scenario I have just outlined means that all is for the best in the best of all worlds for the Alliance and its High Representative...
- Most unfortunately, it is not!
- We are gathered here at a crucial moment. Experts say it may be the most severe global financial crisis and economic downturn seen since the Great Depression began in 1929.
- The turbulence of finances and the global economy, the persistence of the focuses of conflict with no resolution in sight that jeopardize world stability and security, the constant terrorist threat, climate change, the world's imbalances, and the role of poverty and inequalities in fostering hatred and violence, all these realities are in themselves reason enough for worry and alarm.
- Not enough alarm, however, for us to embrace the dark predictions of the clash of civilizations, widely reflected in the press and in some mindsets, but rather to underline the sense of urgency.

- This urgency is due to the fact that as the world grows more interconnected, the far-reaching effects of distress and violence also increase extraordinarily. We all know how in the global information age a conflict anywhere easily becomes a conflict everywhere.
- Urgency is also required because the worsening world economic situation is likely to take a huge toll on the poorest and the most vulnerable, thus fuelling the sense of iniquity and injustice, which in turn may be linked to patterns of radicalization and violent conflict.
- We need to learn from the experience of past recessions. In this regard we should never forget the run-up to the Second World War and the role played by nationalism and protectionism in the constitution of totalitarian and fascist regimes.
- Urgency is also required because, generally speaking, the social pact behind every society is showing signs of erosion, and this can be observed almost everywhere. In a world of porous borders, where migration and mobility of populations are a driving force for economic and social development, our societies face new identity fears, divides and problems related to their increasing cultural diversity.
- All communities have a sense of belonging and their members need to feel that they are part of a common destiny and a shared future. But for different reasons this basic feeling is at risk in most societies.

- Urgency, lastly, because of some conflicts of a political nature which, if not settled through the appropriate channels, will become veritable fault lines between societies and communities and are a major factor in the widening rifts between, let us say, Muslim and Western societies.

Dear Friends,

- It is against this background of urgency that the Alliance of Civilizations has a role to play as a new instrument of the United Nations in building peace, in the broad sense of the term as well as in helping find answers to our huge current and shared difficulties of living together as equals but different.
- This is why the main task of the Alliance is to deal with good governance of cultural diversity.
- To address it, National Plans and Regional Strategies for Intercultural Dialogue are our major key political tools. We need a new thinking, we need new policies to be pursued, we need innovative action.
- It is indeed inspiration we have to work on, all together: we have to inspire global leaders, our next-door neighbours, our friends. We have to inspire the entire world to come on board.

- Inspiration has to be the drive behind innovative ideas, innovative solutions and innovative ways of dialogue and cooperation.
- We need to develop a sense of dialogue which above all means knowing how to listen, to understand, to accept and to respect different points of view. It is also about knowing how to build room for constructive dissent.
- Constructive dissent means that we can disagree over certain issues and that the disagreement does not trigger any rise in tensions or any conflict. Constructive dissent means that we can cope with cognitive dissonance and that it does not stop contenders from doing things together. Moreover, doing things together does not mean that different people must be unanimous in their substantive views.
- Cooperation means collaborative action between people, governments, institutions, private companies, NGOs. Between different constituencies at both global and local level. Cooperation means partnership, which is the only key to success and the only way to gain concrete results in promoting intercultural dialogue, understanding and respect among and within societies and communities, in building a new culture of peace and a strong education for human rights as the only way to live together in peace and harmony and to prevent conflicts.

- It is proven that investing in a culture of peace, in education for human rights and in good governance of cultural diversity would pay off many times over in countries worse hit by tensions and conflicts, confirming that the economic benefits of a preventive approach are greater than the costs, not to mention the incalculable social and human costs of any conflict.
- We can do more, better and quicker. We need evidence in addition to promises and commitments.

Excellencies,

Dear Friends,

- This is where we are today, on 6 April 2009 while opening the Second Forum of the Alliance.
- My hope is that during these days that we will spend together we will have the opportunity for setting up the next steps for the months to come.
- My personal commitment is to report tomorrow to this audience on concrete actions we all need to take to make the Alliance an even stronger global Partnership for peace and to provide an effective contribution to good governance of cultural diversity

- Let me finish by reiterating my motto: the Alliance of Civilizations is the right initiative, at the right time.
  
- Together we shall work to ensure that it will also bring about the right results, not some day, but right now, at our Forum. Let us hope that this will be so! Insallah!

Thank you one and all