

Check against delivery



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

**Group of Friends meeting
(Ministerial level)**

New York,

UN Headquarters

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Mr. Ban Ki moon, Secretary General of the United Nations
Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treky, President of the General Assembly
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen
Dear members of the Group of Friends

- I should like to thank the Secretary General for having made room in his hectic schedule to be among us today.
- Mr. Secretary General, this is a strong sign of your commitment towards the Alliance which is very encouraging for all of us
- Moreover, I should also like to greet Ambassador Ali Abdussalam Treky and thank him for his words. I hope, Mr President, that we can count on you to support the Alliance's initiative during your chairmanship of the 64th session of the General Assembly.
- Last but not least, a warm welcome to the new members of the Group of Friends such as Ecuador and Saudi Arabia as well as to U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Mrs Esther Brimmer and to the Secretary General of the Organization of the American States.

Excellencies
Dear Friends

- In times when the international agenda is full of competing and pressing political challenges, we may be tempted to neglect issues that erroneously we take for granted such as cultural, religious or ethnic diversity.
- But we can not ignore that cultural diversity at large is to human societies what biodiversity is to nature or the cosmos. We can not disregard the fact that diversity, dialogue and exchange are driving forces of change and of progress of humanity and civilization.
- So cultural diversity is not a minor issue. Cross-cultural dialogue is not a superfluous thing. Good governance of cultural diversity is not a luxury or an optional task but it is a serious challenge that our societies, democracies, governments and people are confronted with and are indeed already dealing with in various ways.
- To put it bluntly: the current international difficulties, added to the effects of economic downturn and the continuous flow of populations, increase the anxiety we all feel in living together in mutual respect and are encouraging

the misguided view that cultures are set on an unavoidable collision course leading to a clash of civilizations.

- Wherever I go, when I look around, I get a sense of increased polarization and mounting cultural stereotypes among communities and societies of different backgrounds looming against a backdrop of growing tensions over a series of political issues.
- There are clear, disquieting signs of growing impatience, increased intolerance and above all a lack of steady progress in efforts to engage in a dialogue that delivers.
- Roughly speaking I see the same stumbling-blocks, behaviour and mindset in all parts of the world, making it a global trend that goes far beyond the so-called West-Islam divides.
- For instance, in a number of societies there is a mounting feeling that a threshold has been reached in terms of efforts to bridge cultural and religious rifts, and to integrate migrants and minorities.
- So, many governments are divided between the need to take additional steps to build inclusive societies and strengthening social, economic and cultural cohesion in our globalizing world, and the need to respond to the growing anxiety of their citizens in terms of security in the broadest sense.
- Other societies are marked by growing inequalities, lack of job opportunities, particularly among the young urban deprived population, as well as scarce opportunities to express dissent in the public space and to participate in the political life of their countries aggravating the feelings of despair and anger among communities and widening the sense of persistent discrimination and marginalization.
- Eventually in both situations all this leads to ethnic, religious and cultural identities being more aggressively asserted, sometimes even in violent ways. We know that radicalization and extremism are not decreasing and pose a real threat that affects stability, security and peace worldwide.
- The point I want to make here is twofold.
- On the one hand, divides are everywhere and all societies are confronted with widening rifts that oppose communities of various ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. In this regard, when I speak of good governance of cultural diversity, I want precisely to point out that no democracy in the

world can any longer ignore the importance of management of cultural diversity.

- “Good governance of cultural diversity” is a concept that I forged for two main reasons. On the one hand, to overcome Huntington’s views on the clash of civilizations and get rid of his dichotomies and his negative approach of diversity. On the other hand, to express the global scope of the Alliance and to open the way towards a common paradigm or strategy for intercultural dialogue.
- I am aware that this approach may sound rather strange for some of you. I hope that you understand my point of view but I am indeed open to comments and suggestions to improve the capacity of the Alliance to deliver.
- Because after all this is the main purpose of the Alliance – to go beyond intellectual controversies, beyond the pitfalls of long-standing fault lines that divide the broader constituency of UN member countries by setting in motion processes and relationships that open up avenues of cooperation and narrow the areas of disagreement.
- By linking good governance of cultural diversity to sustainable human development my sole purpose is to create an environment – at national and global levels alike - that stands firm on our common framework of principles and values expressed in the Charter of the United Nations, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as in other documents on cultural and religious rights.
- This is a key point because intercultural dialogue can only take place in an environment where a person is guaranteed safety and dignity, equal opportunities and participation, where different views can be voiced openly without fear, where there are shared spaces for exchanges between cultures to take place.
- Moreover, the common legal framework that I have just mentioned may help to generate sources of good practice projects, inspire new initiatives, develop ambitious benchmarks and open the way towards a common paradigm or strategy for intercultural dialogue.
- This is why the Alliance cannot be a zero sum game for a country but should bring to it added value: an ambition, a shared vision and new tools for cooperation.

- My second point concerns the National Plans that I asked countries to present. This is by no means a new bureaucratic requirement nor an imposition for countries nor a hidden attempt to interfere in domestic affairs.
- National Plans are an invitation to countries to generate an internal process of ownership of the Alliance of Civilizations' goals and aims. National Plans are intended to create concrete opportunities for countries to exchange experiences and lessons learned regarding the common challenge they face in dealing with increasing cultural diversity, new identity problems and conflicts within their own societies and among them. National Plans aim at helping countries to cope with this challenge and generate a new awareness at all levels of the society.
- Let me stress once again that in the face of the diversity of national circumstances, such Plans cannot be devised according to a single model.
- But does this mean that anything can be included in a National Plan, that all you have to do is list the number of programmes or initiatives in progress, and that is that?
- In my view, if that were the case the added value of the National Plans would serve little or no purpose.
- This is why listing existing practices, actions and players involved in intercultural dialogue at the national level to get a comprehensive overview of what is going on is indeed a good kick-off.
- In the wake of suggestions put forward by experts, this is what they call - "**mapping roads**", which in my view is step one of the exercise. Basically this step consists of identifying not only programs, measures and policies that are being implemented in order to foster intercultural dialogue, but also exclusion or discriminatory practices that do not allow intercultural dialogue processes to take place;
- But this is a process and there are additional steps.
- The second step looks a little bit further. It should focus on "**breaking down walls**", I mean on removing barriers to equality and fighting prejudice, racism and stereotypes; introducing incentives or regulatory measures to increase the participation of individuals in public life.
- A third step should aim at "**building bridges**", i.e. developing intercultural skills and competences through educational, artistic and media programs, for instance, which could equip individuals with the necessary tools to fully and successfully engage in intercultural dialogue processes

- A fourth step aimed at “**sharing spaces**” should eventually take place focused on creating spaces where ideas, experiences and beliefs can be respectfully exchanged – in case of conflict, “participants can agree to disagree agreeably” – and where interactive communication can freely flow. This could result in a deeper understanding of diverse views or practices, or lead to new creative processes or forms of expression.
- So, Dear Ministers and participants, let us assume that this is a long-term, gradual exercise to be carried out by countries at different paces, using different roads.
- Some countries are more advanced than others. They may want to go faster and build common roads. Other countries will take more time to be convinced of the need to manage the path of intercultural dialogue.
- By putting forward the suggestion of National Plans and Regional Strategies I do not intend to impose anything on anybody. But I would like the Alliance to help countries open the way to new and creative opportunities towards a common paradigm or strategy for intercultural dialogue. I would like the Alliance to contribute to stimulate countries to go ahead and generate a process that will eventually involve all of its members.
- So please come on board – in this regard, let me stress that there are still some National Focal Points who have not yet been appointed. We will have the 3^d meeting of Focal Points mid November in Rabat and I sincerely hope that the whole community of Focal Points can participate in that reunion.

Dear Friends,

- It is in this framework that I think the next Forum of the Alliance in Brazil will be a unique opportunity for the Alliance and its members to take a step further.
- Not because the Alliance defines its strategy according to the more or less contingent choice of places where it holds its forums, or even because it is at the mercy of more or less ephemeral mega-events. On the contrary, because the forums are manifestations of the Alliance’s local, national and regional reach and because they represent peak moments of inclusive dialogue and multi-stakeholders’ cooperation between a wide array of partners worldwide.
- Until the Rio forum we will continue firmly with our agenda to implement the commitments made in Istanbul and Madrid. At the same time, however, we will enrich the global scope of the Alliance with the Brazilian and Latin American experience of cultural diversity.

Dear Members of the Group of Friends and observers

- Deliver, is really what we all are looking for.
- Our priorities are clearly identified in the new Implementation Plan and the Alliance is moving forward in the implementation of the new initiatives and the development of the existing projects.
- To give you some examples among many others – for instance, last Tuesday, the AoC Global Business Coalition on Intercultural Dialogue has been launched in association with the UN Global Compact; in a few moments, just after this meeting, a MoU between the Arab League, the British Council, the German Marshall Fund of the United States, ISESCO and the Alliance will be signed, allowing the pilot phase of the AoC Fellowship Program, announced in Istanbul, to start; “Dialogue Café Network” one of our most innovative and promising project is well advanced; activities under “Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges” are being prepared or/and materializing and the Conference which President Mubarak will host related to the future Euro-Med Regional Strategy is now confirmed in spring 2010; the AoC Regional Strategy for the South-Eastern Europe will be presented in the Sarajevo Ministerial Meeting to be held on 14th December this year.
- To achieve successfully all these goals, I rely on your close cooperation, your commitment and your engagement.
- So I ask you to continue supporting the Alliance, and would like to urge all members of the Group of Friends to commit at least to one AoC ongoing project as a contribution to the advancement of the Aoc goals in your country, region or field of action.
- Last but not least, let me just express my gratitude for your joint efforts to agree on a draft UN Resolution on the Alliance. This is good news and gives us good prospects to have it approved as soon as possible.

Many thanks