

**STATEMENT DELIVERED
BY
H.E. AHMET DAVUTOGLU
MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY
AT THE
ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS GROUP OF FRIENDS
MINISTERIAL MEETING**

NEW YORK, 26 SEPTEMBER 2009

**High Representative Sampaio,
Minister Moratinos,
Esteemed Ministers,
Distinguished participants,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

I am very pleased to attend this Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations.

I am also greatly encouraged by the view from this rostrum, showing so many countries represented here. The strong support of the international community for the Alliance is our biggest asset in the fight against discrimination, intolerance and prejudice.

The annotated agenda proposed for this meeting contains plenty of food-for-thought on the tasks awaiting us. I am also grateful to High Representative Sampaio for sharing with us this morning his assessments on the progress achieved in our current work, as well as his vision for the future priorities of the Alliance.

In particular, I wish to reaffirm the readiness of my country to continue to contribute to the realization of the Implementation Plan for the period until June 2011. Turkey is also committed to the task of drawing up regional strategies. My country participated in the experts meeting held in Sarajevo last July, to prepare a regional strategy for Southeastern Europe. I look forward to attending a Ministerial Meeting in Sarajevo in December to adopt such a strategy.

Turkey is pleased that Brazil has assumed the task of hosting the next Forum in Rio de Janeiro on 28 and 29 May 2010. The Rio Forum will help

to build upon the progress achieved in the Alliance's Istanbul Forum on 6 and 7 April 2009 and to spread the message of the Alliance in a wider geography. We stand ready to assist our Brazilian friends in any way we can.

A further item on our agenda is the General Assembly resolution on the Alliance of Civilizations. I am pleased that a draft has now been presented to Member States. I very much hope that the draft resolution will enjoy strong support from the General Assembly.

**High Representative Sampaio,
Distinguished colleagues,**

As this is my first ever Ministerial Meeting as part of the Alliance, I would like to outline briefly my views on the conceptual basis of the Alliance of Civilizations. The gist of the message I wish to convey today is that respect for cultural diversity is the most reliable navigational system for us all in the 21st century.

I feel strongly about this because I am concerned that in recent years the fabric holding the international community together has come under considerable strain because of polarization, intolerance and discrimination. A considerable portion of the world's population continues to be portrayed as the cause of a civilizational clash. Millions of individuals and many societies feel left out of the international system. While globalization has achieved improved standards for large parts of the world, many communities have not benefited from its advantages and enabling nature.

The school of thought which defends the theory of "Clash of Civilizations" claims that there are irreconcilable differences between religions and cultures. This school also attempts to re-interpret history in order to try to prove that our common history is one of continuous tension and conflict. Its supporters present essentially protracted political problems as civilizational issues. They also seem to believe that there is a hierarchy between cultures. In short, this school of thought is reminiscent of the totalitarian, chauvinistic or revanchist ideologies which have plunged the world into war, turmoil and misery so many times in the 20th century.

I believe that the Alliance of Civilizations is a sound response to this sinister ideology and its mindless search for uniformity. The fundamental philosophy of this initiative is to achieve broad acceptance of harmony in diversity.

To replace cultural exclusivity with an inclusive approach which embraces all cultures as they are.

To place human dignity at the very top of our scale of values.

To reject offensive generalizations and exaggerated fears of peoples of other faiths.

The Alliance provides an opportunity to refute the notion that our common history is one of unending mutual hatred and conflict. The rich archives of many of the nations represented here contain ample proof of our long tradition of cross-cultural fertilization.

Knowledge has not always travelled from west to east. Intellectuals from various civilizations – Muslim, Chinese, Hindu - made a substantial and direct contribution to the scientific, medical and philosophical heritage of the Western world. The fact that medical books written in the ninth century by Al Razi, known in the West as Rhazes, were used as basic text books at medical schools in Europe until the sixteenth century may have got lost in history. However, from Ibn Rushd, or Averroes, and his prolific writings on philosophy in the 12th century, to Ibn Khaldun, a pioneer of sociology in the 14th century, muslim intellectuals produced numerous works on astronomy, mathematics, medicine and philosophy.

We should also recall that the so-called “Toledo translators” helped to translate, from the 11th century onwards, thousands of such books by Muslim authors into Latin and Spanish. In fact, many original works on philosophy from Ancient Greece were brought to public knowledge in the West not directly, but via Arabic versions acquired by the Toledo translators.

**High representative Sampaio,
Distinguished colleagues,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

While there are enormous challenges facing the international community, I believe that we also have important opportunities before us. The growing international awareness of the need to work for greater harmony and cooperation on international issues gives me much hope. I am also encouraged by the aspiration of the younger generations in all corners of the world to live in open, democratic societies with guaranteed individual liberties and freedoms.

Furthermore, we all have reason to be optimistic for a new beginning in international affairs. There has been a clear intellectual, social and economic revival in the non-Western parts of the world over the last two or three decades. Even traditional societies are now playing a greater part in the cultural, scientific and economic life of our planet. I am also pleased that the Islamic world has begun to debate the complex issues of human rights, transparency, accountability and women's rights. It is a fact that the West has failed to provide adequate support for reform efforts in Muslim countries in recent times. It is my hope that this shortfall could now be remedied with a constructive approach. I should note that Turkey has used her membership of the Organization of Islamic Conference in order to help secure further progress in this direction.

**High Representative Sampaio,
Esteemed Ministers,**

Turkey has supported the Alliance not only in words, but also in deeds. We have continued to implement our National Strategy for cross-cultural dialogue and to contribute to Alliance activities beyond our borders. Furthermore, this support for the Alliance fits well into our overall foreign policy approach. My Prime Minister spoke at length on the main orientation of the Turkish foreign policy when he addressed the UN General Assembly on 24 September 2009.

My final message is that the Alliance of Civilizations is a noble cause. We should therefore sustain and enhance our collective efforts in pursuance of its aims and objectives.

A well-known Dire Straits song (FYI: Brothers in arms) laments that

**“We have just one world,
but we live in different ones”**

Let's ensure that this is not our legacy for future generations.

Thank you for your kind attention.