

DOHA OPEENING STATEMENT BY H.E.

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Distinguished Guests,

It is indeed a great honor for us as the members of High Level Group to be together and open our second meeting with you. I would like to thank you all for giving us this opportunity. I would also wish to express our deep gratitude to His Highness Prime Minister Sheikh Abdallah bin Khalifa el-Thani and Her Highness Sheikha Mozah, Consort of the Emir of the State of Qatar and one of our High Level Group Members for their kind hospitality here in Doha.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In our Mallorca meeting, our long deliberations led us to the conclusion that we, as the members of the High Level Group, should focus, in our second meeting, on five major issues that are extremely important for the Alliance of Civilizations initiative. They are: the political context, education, media, youth and immigration. In addition to our VIP guests, we also invited some well-known scholars and experts to share their ideas and experiences with us regarding the areas just mentioned.

As many people all over the world stated time and again through several ways and means, we are absolutely in need of such global projects as the Alliance of Civilizations initiative-an initiative that has already become a full-functioning international instrument to identify and to diagnose certain sensitive world problems that force us to think and act not only with the guidance of reliable knowledge but also with wisdom and full ethical responsibility.

The recent ‘cartoon issue’ has amply proved that our present predicament, at the center of which stands our fragile international relations in general and politics in particular, is very complicated in

deed. The issue in question and the reactions to it are, in fact, the symptoms and the tips of two icebergs which we all have to take very seriously. Although the general approach accepted by High Level Group is not mono-polar but multi-polar, we feel that we ought to concentrate on these two icebergs.

Behind the cartoon crises, and beneath the first iceberg, lie centuries-old prejudices, a kind of arrogant cultural mindset fed and maintained by a certain type of growing Islamophobic social milieu, and a political vision and praxis that seem to carve their ways largely through enlarged self-interests, unfounded generalizations mainly relying on exaggerated or even invented differences, rather than commonality that exists in all living civilizations. I am afraid and sad to say that the present order of power seem to be fairly reluctant to harmonize itself with the order of moral and spiritual values and responsibilities. But I am also glad to say that there are also many reasons for being optimistic. There is a growing constructive criticism and self-criticism in all cultures and civilizations. Many world leaders, national and international institutions and organized civil societies are willing “to compete in goodness.”

Beneath the second iceberg stands many things, too many, in fact, to count here. There is the unhappy experience coming from the periods of colonialism, certain wounds that have been bleeding more than half-a-century, continuing political, military, economic and even cultural dominations as well as unjust political and economic structures and practices that result in isolation, alienation, frustration, anger and so on.

The leaders and the institutions as well as civil society of the Western and Muslim world have to see these icebergs and, in order to entertain a hope to manage them, to reeducate and renew themselves in light of the delicate, very complicated, and worrying ongoing situation.

To this end, we, as the members of the High Level Group, will try in the coming seven months or so, to prepare a concrete and solid “plan of action” which we hope will contribute to broader and deeper mutual respect and understanding, as it is clearly mentioned by the `joint statement` issued here yesterday evening.

Thank you for this earnest effort and thank you for your kind attention.