



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Remarks of the UN Secretary-General at the inauguration of the Alliance of Civilizations Forum

Madrid, Spain, 15 January 2008

Prime Minister Zapatero, Prime Minister Erdoğan, High Representative Sampaio,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am moved and honoured to be here. This is an extraordinary gathering of leaders from every all sphere -- politics, religion, the media, the private sector and civil society.

You may have different backgrounds and perspectives, but you share a common conviction that the Alliance of Civilizations is an important way to counter extremism and heal the divisions that threaten our world. You share a determination to use the unique platform this Forum offers to talk frankly about cross-cultural concerns, and to advance new partnership initiatives.

Never in our lifetime has there been a more desperate need for constructive and committed dialogue, among individuals, among communities, among cultures, among and between nations.

By co-sponsoring the Alliance, Spain and Turkey have taken a leading role in answering that need. I pay tribute to Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan for their foresight and commitment, and to High Representative Sampaio for his leadership.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We all know the terrible toll intolerance is taking in our world – attacks, killings and even mass atrocities committed in the name of religion. But standing before you now, I am thinking less of problems, and more of solutions.

As Secretary-General of the United Nations, my focus is on results. I am heartened to know that the Alliance of Civilizations is, too.

It is easy to speak about building bridges of trust, about promoting tolerance, about advancing cross-cultural friendship. It is far harder to translate these lofty words into actions – specific actions that change what people see, what they say, and, ultimately, how they act.

It is that difficult mission which the Alliance is rightly pursuing. So ably led by High Representative Sampaio, it has made steady progress where it counts -- on the airwaves, in the classrooms, and among the young people of today who will lead tomorrow's world.

In this way, the Alliance is playing a catalytic role, forging links with civil society, foundations, the media and business leaders. I am delighted that members of this influential network are here today -- and more importantly, that you will keep working together as a broad range of partners after we leave Madrid.

In this context, I warmly welcome the generous contribution to be announced at this Forum by Her Highness Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al Missned, Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation, to address the pressing problem of youth employment. This significant effort to improve work opportunities for young people, first in the Middle East and North Africa, and then beyond, will have an immeasurable impact in preventing and easing social unrest.

I also welcome the work of the Alliance to counter ugly stereotypes in popular culture. If a new crisis erupts on this front, a rapid response media mechanism will furnish voices of reason to reporters and producers around the world.

In all these ways, the efforts of the Alliance will complement the work of the United Nations to implement the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted by the General Assembly in 2006. They will also bolster our endeavours in preventive diplomacy, and in supporting sustainable peace processes. No matter how many resolutions we adopt, envoys we dispatch, or peace agreements we negotiate, their prospects of success will be fragile if the parties do not have a real and profound sense of our shared humanity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fostering dialogue will not produce change overnight. It is not the fast way. But it is the sure way. It is the enduring way. The careful plans of the Alliance – of you, our partners – will deliver in the long run.

Let us use this Forum to advance the momentum. When we depart, let us build on it with all our vigour.

The threats are terrifying. But the responses are at hand.

Thank you very much.