



CONCEPT PAPER

Context

In support of a call by Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of Spain, the Secretary-General of the United Nations has agreed to launch an initiative for an “Alliance of Civilizations,” which will be co-sponsored by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey.

The call for an “Alliance of Civilizations” responds to the need, felt across many divides, for a committed effort by the international community – both at the institutional and civil society levels – to overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization. The Alliance will address dominant narratives in diverse societies, with the aim of providing an effective response to emerging threats to world peace emanating from hostile perceptions that foment violence. The Alliance will seek to bring about cooperation between various initiatives aiming to bridge these divisions.

Events of recent years have heightened the sense of a widening gap and lack of mutual understanding between the Islamic and Western societies. This environment has been exploited and exacerbated by extremists in all societies. Thus there is a need for a comprehensive coalition to counter the trend toward extremism and avert a deterioration of relations between societies, which could even threaten international stability. An Alliance of Civilizations is a reaffirmation of the increasing interdependence of all societies around the world, be it in the environmental or health sectors; in economic, financial, or security relations; or in the development field.

In essence, the call for an Alliance is a call to all of those who believe in building rather than destroying, who embrace diversity as a means of progress rather than as a threat, and who believe in the dignity of humankind across religion, ethnicity, race, and culture.

High-Level Group

To guide this effort, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in consultation with the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey, will convene a High-Level Group of committed eminent persons. The members of the High-Level Group will be drawn from all regions and civilizations and will include leaders in policy-making, academia, civil society, and the media.

The High-Level Group will complete its work and present its report with recommendations by the second half of 2006. The recommendations will include practical policy and action-oriented measures addressed to states, international organizations, and civil society. The report will be submitted to the Secretary-General of the United Nations who, in consultation with the cosponsors, will determine the appropriate forum in which the programme of action will be presented to the international community. The implementation of the programme could then be overseen by a smaller group of similar stature.



Goals

The Alliance of Civilizations aims to forge a collective political will to establish a paradigm of mutual respect between civilizations and cultures. The initiative will take into account the work done by the “Dialogue Among Civilizations” and other related programmes. The Alliance aims to launch a coalescing movement of the vast majority of peoples who do not identify themselves with extremism in various societies in order:

- to strengthen mutual understanding and respect in practical ways;
- to counter the influence of those who feed on exclusion and claim sole ownership of the truth;
- to counter, through such measures, the threat to world peace and stability that emanates from the trend toward extremism in societies;
- to promote awareness that security is indivisible and a vital need for all and that global cooperation is an indispensable prerequisite for both security and stability, as well as development.; and
- to promote common values among different peoples, cultures and civilizations.

Methodology

The Secretary-General will establish the Terms of Reference for the High-Level Group. The Secretary-General and the Governments of Spain and Turkey will seek the support of other committed governments and organizations through a “Group of Friends.”

The High-Level Group will produce a report in the second half of 2006 that will present a programme of action with practical measures seeking, *inter alia*:

- to emphasize the importance of mutual understanding and the dissemination of moderate ideas through media channels, including the Internet, with the aim of countering the extremist ideas fed daily into the world media;
- to foster cooperation between current initiatives aiming at enabling those in the mainstream majority – who are overwhelmingly moderate and reject the views of extremists – to set the agenda;
- to establish partnerships between interested entities in a wide range of countries that will actively promote cooperation toward countering misperceptions across cultures;
- to establish a defined and practical mechanism, based on the recommendations of the High-Level Group, with the objective of reducing antagonism and misunderstandings (principally between the Arab/Islamic and Western worlds, but also between other regional and cultural groups);
- to reach out to the youth of the world to promote moderation and emphasize commonalities between different peoples, cultures, and civilizations rather than differences.

Support structure

A research staff headed by a qualified director will prepare studies and analyses and also establish a network to enable it to draw on work accomplished or under way in other fora. They will propose alternative strategies and approaches to the High-Level Group. A small secretarial staff will provide support services.



Funding

The initiative must be assured of funding for the duration of the term of the High-Level Group and its support staff. For that purpose, a United Nations dedicated account will be established, and the Secretary-General will call for voluntary contributions. Major contributions have already been pledged by the co-sponsors to enable work to commence.

The High-Level Group's report should address the question of securing funding to implement the proposed plan of action that it recommends.

