



**Alliance of Civilizations
Group of Friends Meeting**

New York, 10 June 2008

Summary Report¹

The Alliance of Civilizations GoF Meeting held on June 10, 2008 provided an opportunity for the High Representative to brief the Group on the progress achieved since the First AoC Forum and concrete activities and initiatives undertaken by the Alliance since then. The Meeting was also a platform to exchange views on the themes and format of the GoF Ministerial Meeting in September 2008, the AoC's role in the United Nations system, Focal Points Meeting in the fall of 2008, as well as various regional and local level activities related to the Alliance.

I. Opening Remarks

The Meeting was opened by President Sampaio, High Representative for the AoC, who briefed² the Group on his view on the strategy for the Alliance to move forward and on his recent high level meetings and negotiations with various countries and organizations.

¹ A full transcript of meeting is available

² The full text of the High Representative's Talking Points is available and has been circulated

II. Remarks by Delegates

The Group of Friends expressed its support to the Alliance and representatives of (in alphabetical order) Argentina, Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, China, Croatia, Egypt, Republic of Korea, Montenegro, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Portugal, Qatar, Russia, Slovenia, Turkey, and UNESCO made a number of observations and suggestions, as follows:

1. **AoC Fora:** Turkey informed that it will convene the next Forum of the Alliance in early days of April 2009. It has committed to inform the Group on the final dates of the Forum, send out the invitations to the Forum and seek for participation of the distinguished delegations and leaders. At the same time, Brazil has reiterated its willingness to host the Forum of the Alliance in 2010.
2. **AoC Regional Activities and Partnership:** The Group of Friends' members expressed a strong belief that the Alliance is to be endowed with a solid regional base to further promote its strategies and encourage national actions to concentrate on challenges of inter-cultural dialogue, promotion of diversity and eradication of the culture of intolerance and discrimination. They welcome a reinforced cooperation with the Iberoamerican community and look forward to further concrete actions with it and to the establishment of partnership agreements with other international organizations.
3. **GoF's AoC-related Activities:** Several countries are implementing the AoC-related initiatives and are elaborating National Strategies to fulfill the goals of the Alliance. In particular:

3.1 Russia and Montenegro are advancing in working on the National Strategies, as per the call of the High Representative;

3.2 Slovenia has placed inter-cultural dialogue as one of the priorities of its current EU Presidency, having developed a National Strategy for the realization of the EU Inter-Cultural Dialogue 2008;

3.3 The Korean Government is taking an initiative to establish the Korea Arab Society of Government Civilian Joint Project;

3.4 Bulgaria is implementing its International Plan of Actions and is willing to contribute to sharing experiences and best practices with other members of the Group of Friends;

3.5 Qatar continues its work within the Silatech initiative to contribute to establishment of a strong platform for the Alliance, which was advised to be discussed and supported at the Ministerial Meeting in September 2008;

3.6 UNESCO concluded an MoU with the Alliance and is advancing in projects that are aimed at developing education, cultural and scientific contents that foster dialogue and mutual understanding; intensifying intercultural exchanges among youth; highlighting the role of the media in fostering dialogue and mutual understanding, and establishing new, multi stakeholder partnerships in order to reach out to new audiences;

3.7 New Zealand informed on the East-Asian Summit held in Singapore in 2007 and reiterated the support of EA leaders to carry forward the AoC's projects, particularly in the areas of youth, education and media.

4. **AoC Annual Report:** The Group of Friends welcomed the advancements of the First AoC Forum as indicated in the first Annual Report of the AoC, as well as the additional priority areas, outlined in the Appendix – Addendum to the Implementation Plan. The idea to share the Annual Report with the General Assembly was supported. The latter, as pointed out by Brazil, could enhance non-Group of Friends’ members of the Alliance to be closer familiarized with the Alliance’s activities and stimulate them to join the Group of Friends in the future.

5. **GoF Task Force and Meeting of the Focal Points:** The Call for a Task Force of the GoF to enhance coordination within the Group was welcomed. The GoF’s members look forward to progressing on the Meeting of the Focal Points in the fall of 2008. It was agreed with the High Representative that the Meeting has a potential to promote greater involvement of the Group and to add visibility to the Alliance.

6. **AoC’s Role in the UN System:** Regarding the place of the Alliance within the UN system, it was agreed within the Group that further discussions are to be held on the matter. Generally speaking, it is important to maintain a political nature of the initiative, as well as its flexibility and independence. It was emphasized that the AoC is to preserve its innovative and dynamic nature. Finally, a balance between cooperation with multiple United Nations bodies and, at the same time, avoiding bureaucratization of the initiative, is desirable.

7. **Ministerial Meeting in September 2008:** It would be quite a challenge to convene the GoF Ministerial Meeting in September 2008 in the interactive format, as currently there are over 80 members in the Group of Friends. If possible, several plenaries on specific issues or several working groups could be arranged for a more

informal discussion. It was suggested to the High Representative that the Agenda of the Ministerial Meeting could be formulated around one or several major points for discussion, so that the Ministers had a more focused and in-depth discussion.

8. **Alliance and GoF**: Transparency and accountability within the Alliance are highly appreciated by the GoF. Further collaboration and greater involvement of its members in the decision-making process, selection of participants for the Forum of 2009, more interaction at the regular GoF meetings, as well as with relevant bodies of the United Nations, would be very much desirable and advisable.

The Group of Friends' members expressed their willingness to participate in the Implementation Plan of the Alliance. Selected members committed to continue to support the AoC Trust Fund (e.g. Slovenia) and to greater engage in the AoC's activities (e.g. Austria has recently made a contribution and is looking forward to support the youth dialogue within its funding).

9. **AoC Ambassadors**: An idea to nominate the AoC Ambassadors in order to foster the Alliance's actions in the world was welcomed. The Group is willing to be more updated on their appointment and it is looking forward to receive further clarifications on collaboration with the Ambassadors on the national and regional levels.

10. **Fitna Movie**: The issue of the 'Fitna Movie' was raised in the course of the discussion. A few speakers expressed their appreciation for detailed clarifications on the case and its lessons learned. It was a show case of the Alliance's capacities to react on the ad-hoc developments of potential cross-cultural polarization around the Movie. As noted by China, the Alliance proved to be a 'platform for dialogue among its members on issues such as defamation of religion and freedom of

expression'. The Fitna case demonstrated, in particular, that any concrete or common position or outcome on a particular case is neither desirable nor easily feasible. In this regards, it was suggested that the Alliance is not to serve as another UN committee or commission with the aim to achieve consensus on specific issues.

Also, The Netherlands briefed its colleagues and the High Representative on the reactions from the Muslim organizations, which happened to be quite constructive, and informed that several individuals and organizations in The Netherlands have launched complaints against Mr. Wilders. Currently these complaints are under review in the office of the Public Prosecutor.

Finally, the Rapid Response Media Mechanism (RRMM) received a positive feedback from the Group and the AoC was advised to continue to expand it, 'in order to be more prepared to deal with the re-occurrence of the unfortunate incidences, effectively and efficiently', as Egypt noted.

III. Concluding Remarks and Follow up Actions by the AoC

The High Representative closed the Meeting by thanking the Group for its valuable remarks and comments to the proposed Agenda and to the points for discussion. He has concluded the Meeting with a number of points for clarification and further follow up from the AoC's side:

1. With regards to the Fitna Movie, the High Representative expressed his conviction that Fitna was the example of a moment when the Alliance could not afford being silent.
2. As to the Forum 2009, the High Representative kindly suggested to Turkey to consider having a combination of main themes and working sessions, following the format of the Madrid Forum. It would be crucial to keep and further expand contacts with various networks and organizations, contributing to a greater participation in the Forum.

Also, the High Representative underlined that despite crucial importance of the Fora, the Alliance is to have activities between them and use its Forum as a momentum to appraise activities and project them forward.

3. In July 2008, the Alliance will circulate among the GoF a draft Annotated Agenda, suggesting themes and format of the Ministerial Meeting in September 2008.
4. The AoC Annual Report will be circulated to the General Assembly Member States shortly.
5. The AoC's role in the United Nations system was re-addressed as well: the High Representative views the Alliance as a very interesting political initiative, flexible and such that goes in line with the general reform of the United Nations. Being very young, the initiative is only at the starting point of gaining its shape and it will require at least couple of years to let it evolve into a more concrete institutional scope. Active regional and local initiatives will have a decisive role in this regards.

So far, the Alliance is on the good path and the High Representative is firmly convinced that avoiding repetitions (duplication of the UN agencies' functions) is necessary. The Alliance is definitely not the General Assembly and it is rather a platform for an open debate in an accountable and transparent format, when it comes to issues like Fitna.

6. On the AoC Ambassadors: the High Representative hopes that in the nearest future first AoC Ambassadors - former HLG members - will be appointed by the UN Secretary-General. It is still being decided on the process of selection of experts and celebrities as the AoC Ambassadors (hopefully, network could be appointed by the end of 2008 and used at the next Forum in April 2009). The question on how the AoC Ambassadors will interact with the governments is to be addressed at the first forum of the Ambassadors. Apparently, they will work in direct connection with the High Representative.
7. Finally, President Sampaio reminded the Group of Friends on the importance to generate the AoC-related initiatives. Such initiatives do not necessarily have to be complex strategies. Rather, they could be some elements of work in particular country within the intercultural dialogue.