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ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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ADDRESS

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Political Affairs – Division IV - Human Security

When religions and worldviews meet

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Her Excellency, Ms Micheline Calmy-Rey, Federal Councillor, Head of the Swiss
Federal Department of Foreign Affairs,
Ambassador Claude Wild, Head of Political Affairs Division IV, Human Security,
Distinguished Guests,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends, if I may,

- I am very grateful to the Swiss authorities for inviting me to address this Conference on the complex but challenging issue of worldviews, religions and peace, a topical matter of our globalized times.
- But before entering into details, let me express my gratitude to the Swiss Government for its committed membership to the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations' initiative that I am proud to lead since 2007.
- Switzerland is among the most active members of the Group of Friends of the Alliance, a community of more than 122 members made up of States and International Organizations that supports the High Representative (who so far happens to be myself!) and helps him to shape an agenda to advance the Alliance's goals on the ground.

- Both the so called “thematic platforms” and the “Nyon process” are Swiss branded contributions to the portfolio of ongoing projects of the Alliance. After an initial run-in or build up period it is now time for both projects to gear-up for wider outreach and larger scale commitments.
- I am more than happy to announce that a working session on a thematic platform in the field of humanitarianism and international development cooperation will be held in Berlin in two weeks.
- Let me announce that I myself plan to take part in it and to come up with two concrete suggestions built on two very different case studies: one is the 1st Alliance Summer School that was held in Portugal last August which brought together 115 young people from 44 countries around the world; the other is based on my experience as United Nations Special Envoy to Stop Tuberculosis, an area where I think there is room for the kind of action proposed by you.
- Regarding the Nyon Process, we certainly need to find a way to provide it with additional sustainability and plan the journey ahead.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The Alliance of Civilizations was launched in 2005 by Secretary General Kofi Annan upon a joint proposal put forward by the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey to bridge divides and overcome prejudice, misconceptions, misperceptions, and polarization which potentially threaten world peace.

- Let's not forget the traumatizing sequence of terrorist attacks that started with 9/11 in 2001 and at a regular pace hit various urban settings from Bali, Istanbul, Moscow, and Madrid to London in July 2005.
- Nor should we underestimate the fact that world politics at that time was dominated by the so-called "global war on terror" – Afghanistan was invaded in 2001 and Iraq in 2003, in addition to a number of other counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency actions occurred in several Muslim majority countries.
- As the spokesman for the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan recalled on the occasion of the launch of the Alliance "Events of recent years have heightened the sense of a widening gap and lack of mutual understanding between Islamic and Western societies - an environment that has been exploited and exacerbated by extremists in all societies".
- Therefore – and I quote him again - "the Alliance of Civilizations is intended as a coalition against such forces, as a movement to advance mutual respect for religious beliefs and traditions, and as a reaffirmation of humankind's increasing interdependence in all areas - from the environment to health, from economic and social development to peace and security".

Excellencies,

- Why am I recalling past history?
- Precisely because this helps to frame your topic of worldviews from the Alliance's own perspective!
- So let me start these notes by sharing with you some thoughts on paradigm shifts, worldviews and cultural diversity. This will be my first point. My second point will focus on religions as worldviews and their growing importance in politics and world affairs. My third and last point will deal with soft power tools to address conflict transformation.
- For each topic, I will make a few remarks but will also ask some questions to which, by the way, I have no answer but that, I hope, will feed our reflections here today.

1. On shifts of paradigms, worldviews and cultural diversity

- The Alliance's initiative is underpinned by the recognition that worldviews have to be taken into consideration and integrated into politics and diplomatic practice, not only because a new kind of public diplomacy emerged after 9/11, but also because since then it has been characterized by a strong emphasis on security and insecurity issues and on the relationship between the so-called "West" and the Islamic world.

- In spite of being deeply rooted in old philosophical ideas, the centrality of the concept of worldview in our modern world is linked to a paradigm shift in science, initiated at the turn of the twenty century.
- This paradigm shift led to new scientific discoveries and theories such as relativity and quantum physics, non Euclidian geometries, cognitive sciences, the development of new approaches in cultural anthropology and psycholinguistics and to new models of social behaviour.
- New ways of making diplomacy are also being explored. For instance the use of a plethora of words to qualify diplomacy – public diplomacy, cultural diplomacy, soft diplomacy, shuttle diplomacy, smart diplomacy, transformational diplomacy – shows that there is a new emerging paradigm that challenges traditional diplomatic culture.
- Within this paradigm shift, the importance of worldviews became increasingly clear. The concept was somehow validated by modern cognitive theories on the human mind and its legitimacy consolidated.
- Worldviews appear to be a framework for generating human perception and experience at large. They are a kind of a descriptive model of the world, comprising a number of basic beliefs.
- One main feature of worldviews is that they express fundamental assumptions – cognitive, affective and ethical – that a group of people make about the nature of things and which they use to give coherence to their behaviour and build a sense to their lives.

- Personal identity but also national identities, referring both to the distinctive features of a group and to the individual's sense of belonging to it, are indeed associated to worldviews.
- But worldviews refer to a shared framework of ideas, values, emotions and ethics through which an individual interprets the world and interacts with it.
- Now the growing importance of worldviews during the 20th century is also related to the increasing contact between cultures and greater exposure to diversity – ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural – because of a number of developments.
- Among these factors we can identify some global trends such as: permanent migration flows which changed the population make up of most of the countries around the world; new means of communication and the related expansion of media content; an increase in controversies and debates on value systems and identity issues; globalization and geopolitical changes in general; and world politics.
- Now the question I would like to raise in this regard is threefold:
 - 1. On worldviews: Are all worldviews equivalent? Or are basically incommensurable and therefore irreconcilable? How can we ensure that a constructive dialogue is possible between worldviews? How much do worldviews lead

necessarily to what is called cultural relativism? What about universality of human rights?

- 2. What is the role played by State and governments as regulators of the public space where various worldviews can meet, dialogue and cooperate? Or are worldviews a private affair? How can human rights be used as universal building blocks of worldviews?
 - 3. How much enhancing pluralism in order to ensure an effective combination between basic democratic principles and social and cultural cohesion of a society is at stake?
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- These are indeed questions that ultimately philosophers and social and politics scientists have to solve or think about, but which politicians such as I – but also we all as citizens - have to deal with on a practical basis.
 - Now the point is that the increasing diversity of our societies is becoming an issue, living together is creating growing anxiety and achieving consensus between different worldviews seems difficult to achieve.
 - What can we do to make cultural diversity a shared value by all members of a community as a core part of Rousseau's social contract?
 - What can we do at policy level to promote constructive dialogue between world views?

- I believe that this is one of the main and current challenges for our democracies. To a certain extent, our 21st century has to complete Rousseau's social contract with a new pillar, let's call it a "cultural pact".

2. On religions as worldviews and their growing importance in politics and world politics

Excellencies,

- In our modern times, we are witnessing interesting changes in the world as religion is making inroads into our societies and into world politics.
- The resurgent role of religions is witnessed almost everywhere.
- People now talk about God all the time and fundamentalists of all kinds (Christians, including the Catholic Church, Orthodox Judaism, sects and Muslims) are growing and have been very vocal in their request to express their faiths in the public sphere, believing that religion should rule every aspect of their personal behaviour.
- The expectation that religious movements and faith-based politics would diminish in influence or disappear altogether in the context of modernization and globalization has clearly been disproved by the emergence of religious-political movements with strong popular support in a number of regions and across several different faith traditions.

- Even in Europe, where secularisation of religious behaviour made it a private affair, and secularism is responsible for the clear separation of state and religion, religious movements are thriving.

- Now, going back to the “worldview paradigm”, one could say that the problem in Europe is that secularism can no longer manage to ensure a constructive dialogue between religious worldviews, namely between Christianity and Islam.

- Indeed believers may not like to see religions conceptualized as belief systems but the advantage of this approach is twofold :
 - On the one hand, the question of truth in the various systems of beliefs becomes nonsense because beliefs are like axioms in a theory: they cannot be proven or argued for, but only argued against. Therefore, there is no need to enter into the controversy of the truth of religions – whether Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism or Islam. We can leave theology to theologians and this is good news.
 - On the other hand, being considered as systems of beliefs, different religions can, if they have sufficient beliefs in common, hold a constructive dialogue between them and allow for cross-cultural exchanges. In this case, a consensus between different worldviews can be achieved.

- Now in spite of being a system of beliefs, normally a religion doesn't imprison its believers in it, doesn't preclude them from understanding other worldviews and genuinely communicating with others.

- However, I would like to go further and ask:
 - 1. Is Christianity or Islam to be conceived as a worldview or as part of a worldview? To what extent do different religious worldviews embrace similar – or at least compatible - ethical and political commitments?
 - 2. How do religious and secular systems go together and reinforce each other? What are the tools to be used in this approach?
 - 3. What is the role of religious pluralism?

- I tend to think that we need to reflect further on pluralism, in particular on religious pluralism. Are we confronted with a new religious pluralism? Does it undermine the cultural and social foundations of democracy? Is it the reason why identity politics has become more salient?

- What's wrong with new religious diversity in secular Europe? Is it pluralism that is failing in our present times? After all, looking back on history, it seems to me that "the relation between pluralism and religion has never been unambiguous"!

- Now, because public interest in religious pluralism has growth dramatically in Europe but also on the other side of the Atlantic, religion has moved up the political agenda in Europe, in the United States and around the world.
- Looking at Western Europe as a whole, we can say that growth in religious diversity is mostly related to immigration and that in continental Europe at least, immigration and Islam are almost synonymous.
- This is a key issue to understand the challenges ahead.
- Despite differences of policy responses to ethnic and religious pluralism from country to country, as well as differences in integration policies, the general assessment among publics, politicians and the press is that none of the attempts to integrate Muslim religious minorities into European countries has been successful.
- The success of many far-right, anti-immigration parties in various elections in European countries is a clear sign of a growing malaise.
- But it has to be taken as a wake-up call. How we will master the political, social and cultural tensions that have emerged over the past decade will have a decisive impact on the future and health of democracy on the continent. At least this is my profound conviction.

3. Soft power tools to address conflict transformation

Dear Friends,

- Before coming to an end, let me just say a few words on the third topic I announced at the beginning – however, this will be very telegraphic as I am running out of time!
- The main point that I want to emphasize is that with the paradigm shift new tools and opportunities are available for conflict transformation.
- I will focus here on the use of soft power tools, namely what we can call “cultural diplomacy” at large.
- This is an important tool, in particular when looking at the world in 2009 and we realize that out of a total of 143 conflicts, 108 had a cultural dimension.
- However, please note that by stressing this dimension of some conflicts, I am in no way making the case for the culturalisation of political conflicts.
- Indeed political problems have to be solved by political means.
- But it is also quite clear that protracted conflicts, even when settled by a binding political agreement between political actors or governments focused on the issues of contention, must always be embedded in a

much broader process involving people at all levels of society if we want to reach sustainable peace.

- This is why even in major politically harsh conflicts, soft power has a powerful – although often neglected - role to play because, after all, reconciliation as part of peace-building depends highly on cultural and identity issues, narratives and stories built and exchanged about conflicts, stories that influence their resolution or contribute to their perpetuation.
- Just take the conflict in the Balkans, apartheid in South Africa or the case of East-Timor, three different examples but all of them showing the role of cultural and public diplomacy, as one can call it, as a soft power tool to build sustainable peace among people.
- Take also the 60 year-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict and see how much we should invest in soft power to influence the behaviour of the two parts in order to get the desired outcome of peace.

Dear Friends,

- After all, peace is never made but it is always in the making and negotiated agreements alone do not make peace, whereas people do.
- So let us invest in soft power tools that can be use to change perceptions and worldviews and by changing them, improve the quality of interaction between peoples.

- This is true for conflict resolution, but applies also to conflict transformation in our divided societies.

- In my view, this is a task for an initiative such as the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

- This is all about education, media, youth and migration, the four fields of action of the Alliance. This is all about learning how to live together in our globalizing world, where clashes anywhere are clashes everywhere and where cultural and religious fault-lines are a threat to the cohesion of our societies.

- The Alliance of Civilizations makes full sense precisely in this framework as a new UN soft power tool to make politics and diplomacy and address all these new “glocal” cultural challenges for security and peace.

- This could have been a question, but I prefer to leave it to you as a suggestion and as food for thought and hopefully action.

- I thank you for your attention