**The Sixth Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations**

**Bali, Indonesia, 28-30 August 2014**

**Concept Note of Plenary Session One**

**Unity in Diversity: Celebrating Diversity for Common and Shared Values**

**Background**

"Unity in diversity" refers to the idea that is it possible to attain unity without resorting to uniformity and that diversity does not necessarily lead to divisions. This maxim has been used by a number of nations, organizations and movements over the course of the last few centuries. Some have been or are able to live successfully under this adage while most are still struggling. Given inequalities in development opportunities, widespread economic problems, snowballing globalization, and increasing cross-border movements, there are growing concerns that diversity can breed fragmentation and labelling, which, in turn, fosters identity politics.

At the same time, it is widely recognized that assimilation is not a solution and that we need to move beyond mere tolerance. However, appreciation of diversity as something that enriches humanity and acceptance that diversity is not an obstacle to cohesion remains a widespread challenge.

One way to address this challenge is to organize a nation or a society around shared values. These shared values can translate into a shared framework for belonging to a society or a nation. In other words, shared values shape how individuals behave in a group, the norms they use, what they expect of each other, etc. Respect for these values becomes an organizing core, the base of a shared identity, for a body of citizens that can be quite diverse. Such an approach allows groups within a society or a nation to keep certain traits such as habits, beliefs, history, a native language, etc. that link them to their specific identity while clearly belonging to a larger group that shares common values. This dual belonging can be quite potent as it allows people to contribute, in their own ways, to a common endeavour (or a joint project to build as a collective) that can quite easily evolve over the years and be transmitted from generation to generation. Educational institutions, Media outlets, Youth People and Migrants all have role to play in promotion this common endeavour and fostering adherence to it. By engaging all segments of the population, one provides opportunities for common experiences that can reinforce adherence to shared values and commitment to the common good.

In order to demonstrate that a country’s diversity tapestry can be the perfect backdrop for unity, these shared values should be reflected in public institutions and governmental policies. Public endorsement of these shared values represents a potent tool to fight discrimination and nurture positive relationships between different segments of the population. Civic education can also contribute significantly to conveying the importance of shared values and demonstrating that this can be successfully implemented.

**Suggested Questions**

* Other than the *shared values* approach, what are some other ways in which nations and societies can build unity while celebrating their diversity?
* What are some of preconditions necessary to move toward *Unity in Diversity* within a society or a nation?
* What can we learn from successful and unsuccessful applications of the *shared values* approach? What are some of the lessons learned from organizations, movements or nations that have strived to apply the *Unity in Diversity* maxim?
* How can the *shared values* approach be translated into national policies?

**Speakers**

* Mr. Graziano da Silva, DG FAO
* Prof Farhan Nizami, Oxford Center for Islamic Studies
* Prof. Candido Mendes, UNAOC Ambassador
* Dr. Kamar Oniah binti Kamaruaman, Director, International Center for AOC in Malaysia
* Mr. Bill McAndrews, VP for Corporate Communications BMW Group Global
* Dr. BK Modi, Global Citizen Forum
* **Moderator:** Nihal Saad, Spokesperson for the UN High Representative for UNAOC