



United Nations Alliance of Civilizations



Best Wishes for 2013!

by

Jorge Sampaio, the United Nations High Representative

for the Alliance of Civilizations

Let me extend to you all, members, partners, friends and supporters of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, my heartfelt good wishes for a Happy New Year!

As fifty years ago Martin Luther King spelled out his dream, let us join him at the dawn of 2013 and stand up for our ideals. Let us put our act together and make our dream happen - that we will be able to “hew out of the mountain of despair a stone of hope”; that we will be able to transform the jangling discords [within and among our nations] into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood”. Let us say to the entire world that “as we walk, we must make the pledge that we shall march ahead. We cannot turn back”. Indeed, “there are those who are asking (...): when will you be satisfied?”. But we can never be satisfied as long as “justice rolls down like waters and righteousness like a mighty stream”. These are my best wishes for 2013.

2012 was a year of intense work for the Alliance made up of small but concrete steps forward. We achieved a great deal. Several regional consultations took place – in South-Eastern Europe, in the broader region of the Mediterranean, in Asia-South Pacific. Some of our flagship initiatives were scaled up and reinforced as they celebrated their third or fourth editions and benefited from past experiences – this was the case of the Fellowship Programme, the Summer Schools, the seminars for journalists and the training-session for the winners of the Youth Solidarity Fund. The annual Meeting of the national representatives of the Alliance (the so-called Focal Points), in charge of implementing its goals at country level, also brought together the representatives of member organizations. The meeting was hosted by ALECSO, in Tunis, and a number of very concrete proposals were made to boost the national ownership of the Alliance and foster action on the ground.

2012 was a kind of a consolidation year for us with much emphasis on enhancing the ability of the Alliance to deliver on the ground. We introduced a Replenishment Mechanism to the Voluntary Trust Fund of the Alliance and held in Spring our first ever organized Pledging Conference, which was hosted by Turkey, in Istanbul. This new mechanism that from now onwards will become part of our Annual Forums will

hopefully provide the Alliance with increased and predictable resources. But it is more than a mere financial mechanism. Because at its core lies the notion of a commitment to action as a pledge to address a significant challenge or to contribute to find innovative solutions for making the world a better place in which to live together in a landscape of differences and diversity.

As 2012 draws to a close it is good to pause for a moment and reflect. How were the past 12 months in terms of development, peace, stability, harmony and tolerance as long as these positive trends depend on good governance – or democratic governance - of cultural diversity ? How much sound policies towards fostering pluralism as well as intercultural and interreligious dialogue were real priorities for governments? How much xenophobia, discrimination, prejudice and intolerance pursued their rising path and remained defining features of our societies over the past year? How many of the conflicts that emerged or continued their ravaging course around the world in 2012 were mainly produced or shaped by cultural and religious factors? What was the impact of extremism in all its forms on the life of ordinary people around the world? What was the death toll of violence and terrorism? How many of these conflicts were predictable? How many were preventable through timely and appropriate initiatives based on mediation and confidence and consensus building? How many of the existing tensions are likely to percolate through various crises and spots across communities, peoples and countries in the year to come? How should we put our act together in order to address common challenges and respond in a better way to the needs and demands of citizens around the world?

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations achieved quite a lot in 2012. Let us now hope that the new time to come will see the work done so far scaled up, extended and reinforced.

2013 will be a time of renewal for the Alliance. After more than five years at the helm of the Alliance, I asked H.E. the Secretary General to be replaced. Time forgives no man and the demanding and exalting mission of the Alliance does not mix well with age! Furthermore, it is my true belief that alternation in leadership is always positive for organizations, bringing new energy and inspiring insights.

So I am very pleased to welcome Ambassador Al Nasser, former President of the General Assembly, as the new High Representative of the Alliance. I am sure that under his guidance, the Alliance will thrive and continue its path towards being the Premier Global Platform for Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation. I wish him well.

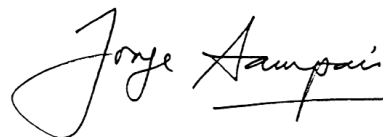
From now until the end of February, when the 5th Global Forum of the Alliance, hosted by Austria, will take place and when I will step down, we will be joining our efforts and working hard together to ensure a smooth transition, a very fruitful Forum and a successful Partners' Assembly.

As all and each of the four previous Forums of the Alliance, we want the Vienna Forum to give a new impetus to the Alliance by enriching its strategic outlook, its agenda and its tools. We want it to lead to the renewal of the global commitment to the achievement of the Alliance's goals.

Throughout 2013, with your support and active participation, a stronger sustainable Alliance should emerge as a UN platform for flexible and effective soft power action more able to deliver on-the-spot results. Together the members, partners, supporters and friends of the Alliance should go further and work to join with millions of citizens, men, women, youth and children around the world to help them pursue a better life. Let us commit ourselves with the people in every country and of every culture and faith to speak out for respect for their universal rights and fundamental freedoms. Let us speak up against rising intolerance, xenophobia and racism in so many parts of the world. Let us stand up with the most vulnerable, with women and young people around the world and join efforts to live up to their aspirations for a life in dignity and respect.

As Martin Luther King's dream goes: "I say to you today, my friends, so even though we face the difficulties of today and tomorrow, I still have a dream". The dream and the hope that the aspiration of the people of the world – all peoples - to justice, to equality of opportunity for all and everyone, to the enjoyment of their human rights, including the right to development, to live in peace and freedom and to equal participation without discrimination in economic, social, cultural, civil and political life in make a step further through the New Year!

Best wishes for 2013.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jorge Ampuero". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.