

Check against delivery



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Jorge Sampaio

UN HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR
THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

“Mediation in the Mediterranean: developing capacities and synergies”

Spanish-Moroccan Initiative

Madrid,

12 February 2013

H.E. Mr. Margallo, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Spain,

H.E. Mr. Saad Eddine El Othmani, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Morocco.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am most grateful for the kind invitation extended to me by H.E. Mr. José Manuel Margallo to address this Seminar on the most relevant issue of fostering Mediation in the Mediterranean.

- As French people use to say, "*le hasard fait bien les choses!*" In other words, I am more than happy to share some thoughts with you on this topic from the perspective of the UN Alliance of Civilizations in what will be one of my last interventions in my capacity as the High Representative for this initiative.

Excellencies,

- Looking around the Mediterranean these days, we cannot avoid noticing great tension involving many disputes, conflicts and even wars going on in our region. Tension within many of our societies ignited by various causes – ranging from social and economic to political and religious issues – that can easily escalate into disputes and conflicts. Disputes on a wide array of substantive issues that are likely to degenerate into clashes. Conflicts that can further worsen. Wars that are disrupting people's life, producing human suffering, destroying countries and undermining stability in the neighborhoods. As well as intractable low intensity conflicts that can escalate into violence.

- All this in our Mediterranean space, one that is the most globalized on earth and where intense multilateral cooperation for the last fifty years should have made the most harmonious, secure and peaceful region in the world.
- But it is exactly the opposite! Let's be honest: our region is in deep turmoil. Here the resurgence of conflicts and the potential for increasing confrontation cannot be ignored.
- What is wrong in our region that allows the devastating disaster in Syria to grow more violent and divisive by the day? What is missing in our region that allows Israelis and Palestinians to get bogged down in an entrenched, pervasive deadlock with no other tangible result than an ingrained hatred of any compromise for a solution? What is wrong with us that we can allow new fault-lines to divide our societies?
- Even as we pursue our different interests, we must also deepen our sense of common purpose towards fostering peace, stability and development in our region as a whole. Our diversity must not divide us. Fault-lines have to be properly managed.
- What are the shortcomings, the failures and the challenges that we have to address to reverse this dangerous tide? There is urgency in reflecting and in putting our act together – countries, international and regional organizations, civil society actors from religious leaders to youth, women and media.

Excellencies,

- Indeed mediation is one possible and very important trend that should be further explored in the peaceful settlement of disputes and in conflict prevention and resolution. Mediation seen not only as a key element of preventive diplomacy but also as a key tool for managing and resolving conflicts.
- But the question is: how can we go beyond merely saying “never again” – as we said and repeated several times in our region for Bosnia, for Kosovo, for Sabra and Shatilla, for Gaza? What kind of mechanisms and procedures have to be implemented to make this phrase truly operable?
- I am not an expert in mediation issues. So the only thing I can offer you is some insight on how the international community can respond to crisis at an early stage and with greater effect, taking into consideration my experience as High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations over the past five to six years.
- Allow me, therefore, to make four remarks.
- Firstly, I really think that there is room for harnessing the potential of mediation in inter-religious and intercultural dialogue both at national, regional and global levels.
- Secondly, cross-cultural skills, the capacity to recognize cultural differences and cultural literacy are key defining features of a good mediator and are critical attributes of an effective and successful mediation process.

- In this regard, I assure you, that the Alliance of Civilizations is well equipped and in a good position to contribute from both of these perspectives towards capacity-building at a regional, national and local level. It can also play a relevant role in creating synergies between educational institutions in order to develop mediation and dialogue training courses as well as new inter-cultural tools.
- Thirdly, education for dispute management, conflict prevention and resolution – at formal, informal and non-formal levels and targeting all age groups –is a powerful tool that should be developed on a massive scale building upon cutting-edge research and the best knowledge available.
- Fourthly, the appropriate use of media and new social media can be instrumental elements for reinforcing the success of mediation processes as well as in the effective implementation of a peace agreement

Excellencies,

- The UN Alliance of Civilizations can contribute further in these four areas in spite of its scarce resources.
- By the way, let me give you two examples of our past activities that are related with mediation. First example - last year, in cooperation with the Government of Malta, and thanks to a Brazilian grant, we organized the Summer School “Guido de Marco” – Building peace in the Mediterranean - which brought together around 35 young people (from 18 to 30 years old) from various Euro-Mediterranean countries, with different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, and different academic and professional profiles.

- This course provided some theoretical and practical knowledge, whilst participants used their own background to discuss their experience in dealing with conflict transformation. Building upon the personal experience of participants, they acquired a firm understanding of the three phases of conflict management - conflict prevention, resolution and reconciliation – as well as some skills and techniques to address violent conflicts at all stages.

- This was a pilot experience. But in the long run, the concrete objectives of this Special Summer School “Guido de Marco”, which hopefully will be replicated this year, are to enable participants: to develop a network of young, resolute conflict negotiators; to launch a student-trainer network by connecting participants to one another and to leading experts in such a way that the UNAOC would provide an active forum for alumni through the use of a network of Dialogue Cafés which will be operational in the Mediterranean area in the near future; and to create an embryonic “Guido de Marco platform on culture and conflict mediation”.

- This is my first concrete example. In a region where a large number of countries have a very young population, it makes complete sense to develop this kind of approach involving young people. In my view this is a trend that could be further developed and expanded, as I have just described.

- My second example regards media, which is one of the Alliance’s main areas of action. We developed what we used to call a “rapid response media mechanism” as a kind of an early warning device to address crisis of a cultural nature through media.

- Taking into consideration that the Mediterranean region is a cultural, religious and civilizational crossroads, where sometimes cultural divides prevail and where dialogue is not always simple or natural, in our times of global and universal communication it is absolutely critical to address media challenges and make new media a platform for engagement.
- This requires three things: on the one hand, to develop further media literacy in order to avoid the pitfalls of fast food communication that sometimes shapes collective perceptions and attitudes based on stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination; on the other hand, to scale up training for journalists and media communicators which will help them to become active and effective facilitators and mediators for peace; in third place, to implement a crisis management mechanism.
- Regarding the last point, it is crystal clear that episodes and incidents involving a cultural dimension have multiplied around the world, and that they can sometimes have a widespread impact and lead to outright violence.
- The very complexity of the issues raised by these crises and the fact that they reflect tensions at the intersection of culture, religion and politics, mean that it is sometimes difficult, within the UN system, to identify what course of action should be chosen to address them effectively.
- From early detection of signs that a crisis is brewing and providing real-time analysis about them (risk assessment), initiatives by honest brokers to defuse tensions (preventive action) to crisis management (once disruptive actions and unrest have occurred and which need to be addressed by means of soft

power tools) and consolidation of peace (through the facilitation of dialogue and reconciliation), all of these dimensions have to be taken into consideration both as independent fields of action and as parts of a whole.

- This is why in May 2010, at our annual meeting of Focal Points in Berlin, there was an informed debate on how to deal with intercultural crisis. In a paper presented at that time, the question of the possible need for an AoC crisis management mechanism and its added value to the existing mechanisms was raised, and its possible outline was discussed.
- The idea was precisely to use our Rapid Response Media Mechanism (RRMM), which is a media early warning mechanism on Intercultural Crises, and reinforce it in order to evolve towards an early warning and early response mechanism available to decision makers in the UN system.
- By reinforcing our existing network of Global Experts and expanding it in a way that they could raise “red flags” about looming tensions and to provide detailed analysis in real time about emerging crises, a step further could be taken.
- Furthermore, partnerships with members of the Alliance having implemented similar mechanisms (such as the EU and the OSCE) as well new partnerships with relevant players (such as, for instance, UN country offices and also think tanks such as the International Crisis Group) would allow the creation of a platform for sharing information and resources.
- This pool of designated experts within the UN Alliance of Civilizations’ Global Expert Finder (GEF) network could be in charge of producing periodical short reports providing background analysis of the situation and recommendations for action.

- Depending on the severity of the issue, such reports would be shared by the High Representative among various levels of decision-makers within the UN system or among other interlocutors, namely the Department of Political Affairs and the Mediation Support Unit according to a case-by-case decision made by him.
- In the case of serious religious and cultural tensions, which have the potential to destabilize societies and lead to fully-fledged conflicts, these reports, complemented with additional information that the High Representative may get from various consultations, would be shared with the Secretary-General or his representatives, providing him with in-depth analysis and, accordingly, recommendations for action.
- Therefore, this early warning and early response mechanism on Intercultural Crises would use three different tools: crisis alerts – short analysis reports sent out as soon as a potential crisis is detected; monthly situation reports and detailed analysis reports reviewing hotspots and areas of potential intercultural tensions around the world; recommendations for action – response-options and time-based strategies to be issued by the High Representative

Excellencies,

- Current tensions, disputes and conflicts going on the Mediterranean region make all of these proposals more relevant than ever.
- In my view, the Alliance' Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean is the right umbrella to develop them and take a step further in strengthening the role of mediation in the peaceful settlement of disputes, conflict prevention and resolution.

- Furthermore, a key dimension underpinning all these possible actions is the creation of a UN Alliance of Civilizations' Observatory that will gather knowledge and exchange expertise which will deepen our understanding of developments in its member countries and will provide concrete evidence for activities and interventions concerning diversity, dialogue, peace and development.
- I am truly convinced that without a good, accurate, sophisticated and permanently updated data-driven knowledge of the changing social and political reality in our region, all policy decisions risk being inappropriate, untimely or divorced from reality.
- This is why this Observatory seems to be a key tool that is missing not only in the context of the Alliance but in the UN system, in particular when it comes to mediation capacity-building activities in the international community.
- But indeed these are only some suggestions for your consideration.
- With regard to possible future cooperation with the Alliance, I am sure that my successor, Ambassador Al Nasser, will be delighted to work with you to develop these ideas further.
- Many thanks