



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Jorge Sampaio

UNITED NATIONS HIGH REPRESENTATIVE
FOR THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

**Message addressed on the occasion
of the Istanbul Center Awards Ceremony-
Art & Essay Contest on the Theme:
“Empathy: Walking in Another’s Shoes”**

(Morehouse College, Atlanta, Georgia, USA), on 25 March 2011-03-25

I should like to thank the Istanbul Center and the Georgia Department of Education for inviting the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations to co-sponsor this contest aimed to encourage young people to think about the topical issue of “Empathy: Walking in Another’s Shoes.” This is an utmost important motto for our lives in the 21st century, in particular in those societies which are undergoing big changes in the Middle East and North Africa.

The UN Alliance of Civilizations, as a platform for action to bridge cultures at the global, regional, and national level, already has a solid network and an appropriate frame for action expressed in the UNAOC Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean, adopted in Malta in November 2010. Its Action Plan, to be presented in the coming days, will aim at contributing to consolidate these democratic transitions and meet people’s aspirations, namely expressed by youth. Further to the projects to be announced, the Fellowship Program as well the UNAOC Summer School both launched last year, are outstanding opportunities to empower emerging leaders and

expose them to cultural diversity and engage them in dialogue in order to understand the differences and similarities across their societies, and create a network committed to helping each other. We are currently examining several projects that would help with this transition, particularly in the areas of youth civic engagement and human rights learning. Your contest “Empathy: walking in another’s shoes” is all about the values of the UNAOC and its ideals.

Your task, in this competition, has been to explore the other kind of empathy – an empathy born from the creative spirit and from the imagination. This kind of empathy is increasingly going to be important as the world confronts a cauldron of challenges which sometimes occur at the same time.

Through this competition you have been imaginatively able to put yourself in the shoes of your close neighbors and your distant neighbors. As a result of this competition, I hope you are more inspired to be civically engaged, and take an interest in taking the global to the local, and the local to the global. Your horizons have been widened, and will continue to expand for those who are lucky enough to go to Turkey. And you have developed the competences that are crucial to solving humanity’s problem across divides. These skills include creative problem solving, critical thinking, and interdisciplinary study.

I commend the Istanbul Center’s efforts to promote better understanding and closer relations between communities through this educational competition. The efforts of the UN Alliance of Civilizations are multiplied when civil society organizations implement activities to bridge cultures together. The Alliance, as in this case, can help by promoting and disseminating such activities as an example for other organizations. In my view, the value of the Istanbul Center’s annual Art and Essay Contest is in stimulating young people to think positively and creatively about dialogue with each other and bridging cultures. Dialogue and mutual respect depend on us being able to stand and walk in each other’s shoes, for it is only then that we will have a basis for knowing and understanding where we each come from, where we are, and where we are going.

Thanks for your support and participation. Congratulations!