

*Check against delivery*



## ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

### **TALKING POINTS**

**Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting**

New York

*UN Headquarters, Room C3*

*24 September 2010*

Mr. Ban Ki moon, Secretary General of the United Nations

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear members of the Group of Friends

- Let me begin by expressing to you, Mr Secretary General, on behalf of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations, our deep appreciation for your presence among us today.
- Being as it is the most hectic time of the year, your company is the strongest signal of your commitment to the Alliance and of your support for our challenging mission.
- Thanks also to the representative of His Excellency Mr. Joseph Deiss, the President of the General Assembly. for his words.
- Now, a special warm welcome to the new members of the Group of Friends: since the Rio Forum we count among our community as new friends the African Union, the Palestinian Authority, Ghana, Georgia and Vietnam.
- Last but not least, greetings to you all, Excellencies! Thanks for your participation in this reunion, for bringing forward your ownership of the Alliance, of its goals and mission.

Excellencies

Dear Friends

- Since the time I was asked to open up new avenues for intercultural dialogue and cooperation as the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, three and half years ago, I have been warning against indifference to a number of signs of growing erosion of tolerance, confidence and trust among peoples and nations as a global emerging trend. I have been warning against the danger of inaction.
  
- The National Plans and Regional Strategies for intercultural dialogue and cooperation that the Alliance is strongly encouraging its members to develop are precisely aimed at creating dynamic policy instruments in the fields of education, youth, media and migration in order to address cultural and religious divides and avoid that they degenerate into conflicts.
  
- It is crystal clear that the present social and economic crisis is fuelling increased tensions among communities, amplifying the sense of insecurity and feeding feelings of resentment and hostility against migrants and minorities.

- The last few months have borne witness to growing clashes around a range of issues that lie at the heart of relations between cultures and religions. Intolerance and discrimination are rising, let's face it.
- These events throughout the world prove that the need for advancing the goals underpinning the Alliance with appropriate action is urgent.
- In my view, appropriate action requires common and joint efforts to be deployed at all levels: locally, nationally, regionally and internationally.
- In this regard, let me stress that the main mission of the Alliance is to encourage its members, partners and stakeholders to develop a long term strategy to deal with cultural diversity challenges.
- Although it has a global scope, its urgent task is to build bridges and promote dialogue and understanding, in particular between Western and Muslim societies. This is a top priority for action because all findings unanimously show an increasing polarization in the way Westerns and Muslims view each other.

- The Alliance has to act first and foremost as a catalyst and a facilitator, a convener, a match-maker and a broker with a view to promoting tolerance, intercultural understanding, and mutual respect between cultures and religions.
- These are indeed long term investments, efforts that take time to produce changes on the ground and that remain invisible to a large extent.
- Now you may ask: and what about the role of the Alliance in crisis management?
- Well, there is the Rapid Response Media Mechanism which has been reinforced thanks to a grant received from the United Kingdom. It is a key tool for conflict prevention and reduction but it is pretty clear that it needs further consolidation and expansion. On the one hand, because media plays a central role in globalizing tensions and conflicts; on the other hand, because sometimes tensions are truly a media by-product.
- The Alliance can also play a role in crisis management through its constituencies, through its High Representative and his secretariat.

- But I don't think you can expect the Alliance to act as a fire-brigade. During crisis situations I have always prevented the Alliance from making useless noise. As you know, quiet diplomacy behind the scenes is likely to be more effective. On the other hand, in times of intercultural tensions, local and national players tend to prefer to take the lead, a stand that I have always respected.
  
- However, let me be frank with you – the easy globalization of virtually all tensions and conflicts should make us reflect on the need to develop new crisis management mechanisms within the Alliance.
  
- It is my intention to include this item in the Agenda of the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of Focal Points in Berlin end October because I am not happy with what we have achieved so far and I would like the Group of Friends at Focal points level to discuss this issue further.

Dear Friends

- I have always seen the Alliance of Civilizations as a most timely and needed United Nations initiative aimed at filling an emerging and pressing gap in the global agenda.

- I was most honoured when I was invited to be its High Representative and since then I have been trying to give it an appropriate dimension, provide it with an operational road map and build it up on the basis of a multi-stakeholders network of partnerships, sharing as much existing knowledge, know-how and resources as possible and delivering as one.
- This explains that since 2007 we have managed to operate with a staff of around 10 people and a total budget of around 11 million dollars over all this period.
- But this is no longer sustainable. Since 2007 membership has tripled. Tasks ahead have multiplied. The need for action to tackle our current difficulties in living together is pressing.

Excellencies

Dear Friends

- We are all responsible for the Alliance. But as its High Representative I am in the front line.
- So far you have trusted me and I have felt we could go ahead even if all the time we were on the razor's edge.

- In spite of my repeated calls for providing the Alliance with means that will allow it to live up to expectations, the overall situation is unbearable.
- Therefore it is my duty to warn you about the risk of going into liquidation unless the Trust Fund is provided with fresh contributions.
- More than that, however, the Alliance needs sustainable resources. This is the reason why I proposed introducing a periodic voluntary replenishment mechanism. This is also the reason why I draw your attention to the need to reinforce the Alliance's capacity to act and follow up ongoing activities.
- At a time when budget cuts are made everywhere, it may seem inappropriate to ask for more. But here, more does not mean a luxury but simply the option between to be or not to be.
- In my view we cannot afford the cost of giving up. I guess you share the same opinion. Therefore I count on your support to find out new ways to reinforce the sustainability of the Alliance in order to allow it to deliver.



- We have an important timeline in front of us: the 1<sup>st</sup> Regional Conference for the Mediterranean in Malta on 8-9 November where the Regional Strategy and its Action Plan will be endorsed by Ministers, thanks to a successful preparatory process hosted by Egypt; the 4<sup>th</sup> Focal Points meeting which will be held in Berlin on 25-27 October; the launch of the preparatory process of the Latino-America Regional Strategy in Peru in December to which all the relevant partners are invited to participate; and the launch of the Action Plan in South East Europe by the end of this year.
  
- We cannot miss these opportunities to make the Alliance advance its goals. I am indeed in your hands but I am sure that, together, with all our will, determination and tools, we will be able to fulfil the tasks we have before us.
  
- Many thanks