



Second Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations
Istanbul, Turkey, 6-7 April, 2009
Working Session 11
Cost of Conflict in the Middle East
Monday, 6 April, 15h00- 16h30
Organized by the Strategic Foresight Group

Background

The Alliance of Civilizations High-Level Group Report, submitted to the UN Secretary-General in November 2006, underscored the importance of resolving conflicts in the Middle East.

Several leaders around the world have spoken of the need to find new approaches to resolve these protracted conflicts. Governments and institutions in Turkey, Switzerland, Norway, and Qatar – countries that have played active roles in the Alliance of Civilizations – supported a study on Cost of Conflict in the Middle East undertaken by India-based Strategic Foresight Group. More than 50 experts from all major countries in the region – including Egypt, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Palestine Territories, Qatar – provided intellectual input into the first-ever effort in 60 years to measure economic, social, political, environmental, human, diplomatic, cultural, psychological, educational and other costs of conflicts in the region on 97 different parameters. The report on Cost of Conflict in the Middle East was launched at the United Nations in Geneva in January 2009 and instantly attracted worldwide media attention. More than 300 newspapers, blogs and websites have highlighted its findings. For instance, the report points out that the Middle East has incurred a loss of \$12 trillion since 1991 due to various conflicts. About half a million people have lost their lives, mostly in the two Gulf Wars, and also the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts and in Lebanon. The Palestinian people have lost 100 million man-hours due to checkpoints and blockades. About 20 million square meters of agricultural land has been destroyed. The report also highlights the plight of children and youth. On an optimistic note, it concludes that income of every household will increase substantially if conflicts in the region are ended – e.g. \$4400 per family per year in Israel, \$1250 in Jordan and \$500 in Egypt.

The highlights and excerpts from the report, as well as comments of world leaders and glimpse of media coverage, are available on the following website: www.strategicforesight.com

Description and Structure of this Working Session

The session will begin with the moderator highlighting some of the key findings of the report. The panelists will discuss (1) key messages from the report (2) implications of the conflicts in the Middle East for wider relationship between Western and Islamic countries (3) future risks if there is lack of urgency about economic, human, environmental and other costs (4) significance of current positive developments such as the election of the Obama Administration, successful unity talks between the Palestinian factions, stability of the unity government in Lebanon (5) initial first steps to be taken by actors in the region (6) the role of the international community (7) the role of younger generation.

Objectives of this Working Session

There are three objectives of this working session:

- 1) To emphasize the importance of understanding cost implications – past, present and future – of protracted conflicts in the Middle East and their adverse implications for worldwide relations between the Western and Islamic societies
- 2) To mobilize political will to build peace and specific measures that can improve human security
- 3) To solicit the comments and suggestions of interested participants on the way forward