



**Second Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations
Istanbul, Turkey, 6-7 April, 2009
Working Session 12: Islamic and Muslim contribution
to the European culture, societies and identities¹
Tuesday, 7 April, 09:00 – 10:30**

Organized by the Organization of the Islamic Conference in partnership with the British Council and
and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures

Background

As it was indicated in the HLG Report of the Alliance of Civilizations, the nature of civilizations and cultures “is to overlap, interact and evolve in relation to one another.” Civilizations, in different respects, all contribute to the evolution of humanity. “The history of civilization is in fact a history of mutual borrowing and constant cross-fertilization”. (2.4) For example, “during medieval times, Islamic civilization was a major source of innovation, knowledge acquisition, and scientific advancement that contributed to the emergence of Renaissance and the Enlightenment in Europe...Similarly in recent centuries, political, scientific, cultural and technological developments in the West have influenced many aspects of life in Muslim societies.” (4.2) The positive historical relations among civilizations are usually underestimated or totally ignored in the contemporary scholarly and political discourse, thus leading towards the feelings of cultural superiority, and at times, dangerous dichotomies.

Description and Structure of this Working Session

This Working Session will focus on the themes of interaction and contribution in a civilizational context and will investigate specifically in what respects Islamic culture and civilization have influenced and contributed to the formation of Western civilization.

The session will feature interactive presentations of projects related to the main issue. One of the projects to be featured by the British Council is called “Our Shared Europe”.

“Our shared Europe” is a project aimed at strengthening the bonds of trust between Muslims and other majority and minority communities in Europe by creating more understanding and awareness of the many contributions that Muslims have made in history and in present-day Europe. This project is born

¹ Provisional concept paper

out of a sense of urgency that something needs to be done, soon, in partnership with likeminded groups and on a significant scale in order to have meaningful impact.

Objectives of this Working Session

The main objectives of the session are threefold:

- to demonstrate the fallacious thinking behind the clash theories that consider civilizations as integral or static entities closed to outside influence, or envisage them as permanent rivals in continuous conflict.
- To specify, by being guided by historical examples, in what respect civilizations can foster mutually advantageous relationships and can create a space for cultural enrichment and diversity.
- To engage participants in ongoing projects such as “Our Shared Europe”