



Second Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations
Istanbul, Turkey, 6-7 April, 2009
Working Session 6
Empowering Women to Strengthening their Role in a Culture of Peace (working title)
Monday, 6 April, 15:00- 16:30
Organized in partnership with the United Nations Development Fund for Women

Background

The Alliance of Civilizations HLG Report, submitted to the UN Secretary-General in November 2006, underscored the importance of respecting Human Rights as defined in the Universal Declaration as well as of developing the Alliance within an international framework that includes the commitment of all countries to work toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

However, the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of women, in spite of being Human rights and representing MDG 3, have to be further integrated in the four main areas of work of the Alliance (education, youth, migration and media) in order to become a future priority focus of action.

Women have always had an essential role at the heart of communities and wider society. As local leaders, they make their communities stronger. Moreover, they have a unique viewpoint on the challenges faced by communities they live in – whether that is the threat of anti-social behavior, young people feeling disengaged, or violent extremism. They are also uniquely placed to help solving these problems.

Unfortunately, all too often their voice goes unheard. Some do not have the confidence or the skills to speak up in forums dominated by men. Others face practical barriers such as:

- a) Education – it is important to make learning accessible, taking into account responsibilities and priorities adults may have that are barriers to learning. How to provide resources such as language classes when needed, basic numeracy and literacy skills, and capabilities and qualifications that enable women to be full participants, and realize their full potential in urban societies?
- b) Civic Participation – it covers a wide range of activities from volunteering to getting involved in schools, councils and other arenas. What are the economic, political and social barriers that prevent their voluntary activities? Also, what are the examples of successful programs of involving women in voluntary activities?
- c) Preventing violent extremism – Women have a key role to play in challenging prejudice and stereotypes both within their communities and in wider society as they are at the heart of communities undertaking a multitude of roles. Resilient communities cannot be built and sustained without their active participation. It may also be important to point out that women are often also the victims of violent extremism and civil war (e.g. rape as a weapon of ethnic cleansing)

Organization of this Working Session

The format for this working session will follow an interactive “interview” style thus avoiding pre-prepared speeches. The moderator(s) will ask panelists to answer questions in a maximum of 3 minutes each, taking

turns to ensure that each panelist can answer a certain number of questions. Panelists will be encouraged to engage into 2 minutes debates after questions for which they hold different points of view. A total of 5 or 6 questions will be asked and will pertain to the question of how to make women's voice heard on critical social issues such as education, preventing violent extremism and civic participation in general; successful methods for women participation; examples of current initiatives facilitating women participation; recurrent needs and challenges; lessons learned; and success stories. This "interview" portion of the working session will last approximately 50 minutes.

Before questions are asked to panelists, a 5 minute introduction to the topic will be offered by the moderator(s) or member(s) of the High Level Group.

Once the "interview" portion of the working session has been completed, we will turn to Q and As from the audience for the remaining 35 minutes. The moderator will ensure that each panelist responds to at least one question from the audience.

It is important to note that all panelists and moderator(s) will be well briefed in advance with regards to expectations, interactions and length of interventions.

Objectives of this Working Session

There are three objectives of this working session:

- 1) To raise the profile of gender issues within the Alliance as a transversal thematic
- 2) To address cultural obstacles that prevent strategies for women's empowerment and gender equality to be effective
- 3) To find out ways of working on women's issue within the practice areas of the Alliance and ask comments and suggestions of interested participants on the way forward