

**ADDRESS BY H.E. MR. RECEP TAYYİP ERDOĞAN, PRIME MINISTER OF THE
REPUBLIC OF TURKEY AT THE OPENING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP
MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS INITIATIVE
PALMA DE MALLORCA, 27 NOVEMBER 2005**

My dear friend Prime Minister Zapatero,
Esteemed Co-Chairs,
Distinguished members of the High Level Group,

At the outset, I would like to express my pleasure in being with you today while taking the first steps of a very important process.

Indeed, the work you'll be undertaking during the next two days will represent the initial steps of our joint march towards a better world in peace and stability.

I extend my gratitude for the understanding and devotion that you have displayed by assuming this responsibility and making your rich experiences available to the service of humanity for the fulfillment of our common goal.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Secretary General Kofi Annan, who personally led the establishment of this High Level Group and brought such distinguished personalities together.

Dear Guests,

Today, I will not make a long speech dwelling on the importance of the initiative that we have launched. You are all well aware of the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative and of the circumstances that have led us to this point.

However, considering that the task you have assumed is of a rather different nature than earlier works undertaken on the matter, I would like to say a few words on what exactly is expected of the High Level Group.

Indeed, in light of the widening of the gap of understanding between different cultures and religions and the growing threat this posed to humanity, many initiatives were recently launched in order to promote dialogue among religions and cultures.

We support all these initiatives and try to contribute to them as much as we can.

However, to be frank, one can see that a great deal of these initiatives only highlight the need of dialogue by merely describing the current situation but fail to offer a strategic and pragmatic approach on what needs to be done in concrete terms.

It is exactly where the complementing difference of the Alliance of Civilizations project lies as well as that of the work you will be undertaking.

What is expected of us, is not merely describing the problem we face today. We need to come up with an analytical evaluation of the underlying factors and identify practical measures that will urge communities to work together for a common future.

I believe that the very added value of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative will indeed be the Action Plan that you will prepare in this direction.

While doing this, naturally we first need to evaluate the origins of the problem and the reasons why people are led to perceive each other as the "other" or the "counter".

Similarly, we should be able to clarify whether cultural or religious differences are indeed testimony to the existence of isolated civilizations that need to be reconciled or whether there exists a common civilizational link based on universal values for all humanity irrespective of race, language and religion.

In our judgment, throughout history, all communities have contributed in their unique way to the humanity and to our common civilization with their cultural and religious richness.

Irrespective of their religious or cultural attributions, human beings have all pursued a common civilizational trajectory shaped by more or less similar instincts and ideals from the most primitive to the most sophisticated ones.

What needs to be done today is to make these common values more visible. We have to make clear that the violence, terror and intolerance that is affecting us all cannot be attributable to religious or cultural motives, but on the contrary, that no religion or culture comprises elements encouraging discord among people.

Accordingly, an effective and strong answer could be given to apocalyptic scenarios based on the inevitability of a "Clash of Civilizations" and a common basis that will enable us to act in alliance could be formed in response to theories that foresee the partition of humanity according to new demarcation lines.

Therefore, it is of great importance that the report you will prepare and submit to the UN in 2006 should not only be of an academic nature but it should contain practical elements as well.

To this end, the political, economic and social factors that currently drive certain groups and societies to violence and/or antagonistic thinking should be well researched. And while doing so, the circumstances and dynamics of today's world should be taken into account as much as historical developments. As a result, there should be a list of concrete measures that both Governments and civil societies will have to implement.

At this point, I would like to make a special emphasis on the role of civil society. For, our societies are currently at the risk of being encamped against each other as a result of long-dated prejudices, misperceptions and mis-directions, and that it would not be possible to mobilize them against this trend through top-down information campaigns.

The fight against this exclusion reflex and risk of division on the basis of subjective dictums of civilization should be supported by an effective bottom-up civil society movement.

Therefore, I expect you to pay particular importance to defining the contributions that the civil society organizations can bring into the campaign.

Likewise, given the fact that this will be a long-term process, I would also like to stress the importance and priority of getting our youngsters on board so that the future generations can effectively embrace the philosophy behind the Alliance of Civilizations project.

Distinguished Guests,
Members of the High Level Group,

Our world is undergoing a difficult period.

In order to look into the future with confidence, our peoples need hope. But they also aspire for sound visions and strategies to make it real.

This is precisely why and how the Alliance of civilization is envisioned and thus it represents an extremely important initiative.

As the Prime Minister of a country which has pioneered many similar initiatives in the past such as the OIC-EU Joint Forum and displayed a firm determination to make use of its unique position to this end, I would like to express my heartfelt confidence for the success of this initiative.

Taking this opportunity, I would also like to thank Prime Minister Zapatero, who is the founding father of this project, which I have the honor of co-sponsoring, and the Secretary General of the UN who has been an ardent supporter of the initiative from the very outset, for their leadership and invaluable contributions.

However, the success of the Initiative will first and foremost depend on you and on the guiding principles that you will put forward.

A solid infrastructure and a strong common basis are of vital importance for the accomplishment of the Alliance that we dream of building upon.

Believing that you will accomplish this task in the best possible way, I would like to re-emphasize that Turkey will be ready to provide every support you may need.

In concluding, I should express my enthusiasm and honor for the fact that we will host the last meeting of your Group in Turkey, during which our Report and the Action Plan will be finalized.

I wish you all the success in your work.