



## ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

### **Statement of His Excellency Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime minister of the Republic of Turkey At the Opening Session of the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum**

15th January 2008, Madrid, Spain

My dear colleague, Prime Minister Zapatero,  
UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon,  
High Representative Sampaio,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We are gathered here today for an important occasion.

We are proud to have reached another significant milestone in the Alliance of Civilizations initiative which we launched together with Spain in 2005, under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General.

First of all, I wish to thank my dear colleague Prime Minister Zapatero who is hosting this first Forum and High Representative Sampaio who has placed his extensive experience and wisdom at the service of our initiative.

I am also grateful to the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who has adopted the Alliance of Civilizations project, assumed personal responsibility for it and steered it at every stage.

In actual fact, the Alliance of Civilizations initiative has reached a certain level of maturity within a short space of two years.

The Group of Friends, which is growing daily and currently comprising 80 countries and international organizations, has become an indicator of the global character of the initiative.

This Forum will no doubt provide an important opportunity to review the significant developments of the recent past and to enhance cooperation with respect to the period ahead.

Dear participants,

As capital, information and values become increasingly globalized in our world today, it is unfortunate that hatred, fear and intolerance are globalized, too.

Just as we were hoping that societies would get better acquainted with each other and misunderstandings would be removed, we have been confronted with the threat of deepening gaps as prejudice and ignorance take hold.

It is reasonable to expect the gap between cultures and religions to narrow in our world where information is so easily accessible.

However, we note that, for a variety of reasons, that gap is not narrowing, but, on the contrary, widening.

As the world comes closer, peace and stability have unfortunately not been secured to the same degree.

We regret to observe that lines of division are being emphasized, instead of humanity's common values.

While the senseless fanaticism caused by the emphasis on dividing lines leads to tragedy in one part of the world, societies prosper in other regions.

Fanaticism is to respect our own right to life, to disregard other people's right to life and to prevent diversity from expressing itself freely.

Anyone in the world today with something to say, regardless of his country and his religious affiliation, has to fight fanaticism, because we are all responsible not just for ourselves, but also for the rights of all living creatures.

We are obliged to be genuine defenders of peace, brotherhood, law and justice.

All monotheistic religions have presented a holistic set of values. This is the common message of all religions.

If one fails to listen to the message of creation, one would not be able to defend the rights of any living creatures, let alone human beings.

We should act with the motto "we love the created, for the creator's sake" and render peace, tolerance, love and respect available for all.

To regard diversity as alien and to isolate "the other" is the starting point for division and conflict.

The correct thing to do, however, is to regard all creatures in the same vein and to achieve unity in plurality.

Friendship, compassion and justice, which the human kind needs today as much as it needs water, bread and air, could only be made possible by behaving in line with the purpose of man's creation and ensuring that compassion rules our interactions.

The Alliance of Civilizations project has been devised to put an end to the prejudices and polarizations on the basis of civilizations, cultures and religions.

We can deal with this challenge only through a long term, well-planned and determined effort.

We may thus take the necessary steps to remove not only the problems which are visible, but also the fundamental elements which give rise to them.

In this respect, the importance of solidarity and cooperation is obvious.

Not only would we not be able to attain any of these aims by ourselves alone, we could also clearly not reach our objectives as a whole unless we secure the sufficient level of solidarity.

We should therefore endeavour to raise awareness and take all necessary measures in our own geography, while at the same time acting in harmony and concert at the international level.

This is precisely where the Alliance of Civilizations seeks to add value by filling an important gap in the international area and generating a serious web of solidarity against prejudice, intolerance and the trend of polarization.

The initiative is assuming an increasingly global character and reaching ever greater mass of people through the cooperation it fosters.

Action- and result-oriented projects are extending the coverage of the Alliance of Civilizations and enhancing its effectiveness.

In fact, the projects to be officially launched at this Forum on the media and the youth will fill important gaps.

Since our age depends upon information and communication, the media has an important role to play in transforming misunderstandings into proper appreciation.

This dimension has been treated in detail in both the report of the High Level Group and the implementation plan.

As the Alliance of Civilizations is a forward-looking and long-winded initiative, its immediate target audience is the youth and successive future generations.

Raising awareness among younger generations on harmony in the face of cultural diversity is therefore a priority issue.

The initiative's constructive activities and projects in this field, too, help to maintain our hopes for the future and enhances our optimism.

Of course, these steps constitute only the beginning.

They should be followed with new projects in the future.

In this direction, the National Strategies for cross-cultural dialogue to be prepared by participating countries will no doubt form an important indicator.

They will both respond to significant requirements at the local level and constitute the building blocks of a common global endeavour.

I am pleased to declare that Turkey has prepared its National Strategy and will present it during the Forum.

Our Strategy rests on the principles of plurality, respect for diversity, cooperation, dialogue, respect for human dignity and gender equality.

A National Coordination Committee comprising the relevant Ministries and institutions will oversee the implementation of the Strategy.

Intensive cooperation will be pursued with non-governmental organizations, civil society associations, universities and the media in order to promote and implement the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations initiative as widely as possible.

Various conferences will be hosted to help enhance the atmosphere of dialogue and tolerance at both the local and international levels.

Distinguished guests,

The issues I have just outlined assume a greater significance when considered together with Turkey's own location.

Turkey is a secular and democratic republic which has an overwhelmingly Muslim population and a dynamic market economy.

Turkey is the only country which is a member of both the Organization for Islamic Conference and NATO and pursuing accession negotiations with the European Union.

It is now generally accepted that, with these special characteristics, Turkey represents the best panacea against "clash of civilizations" theories.

The process for Turkey's accession to the European Union process is therefore an issue which is closely followed around the world and could have deep repercussions on a global scale.

There is no diversion in Turkey's resolve to abide by its obligations with respect to aligning itself with the European Union.

In this respect, Turkey does not expect any special favour or treatment by the European Union, either.

Turkey's membership in the European Union will also significantly enhance the Alliance of Civilizations process.

It will thus become obvious that the perceived polarization between diverse cultures and religions is not "an actual fact", but "something desired" through the provocations of some circles.

This is an opportunity that should not be missed.

Our appeal from this rostrum is that this opportunity should be appreciated and acted upon, because every hurdle to be placed in Turkey's path for religious or cultural reasons will become bricks in a wall cutting off the road to enlightenment, harmony and tolerance.

Distinguished guests,

The risks carried by the polarization and conflict which is being provoked between diverse cultures and faiths around the world oblige us to take resolute steps today.

We should devise some measures on the basis of culture and faith, in order to remove the potential risks and threats.

A further point which I wish to emphasize is that Turkey has always supported every initiative and effort designed to achieve harmony among diverse cultures and faiths, to raise awareness on this issue and to resist prejudice and intolerance.

The important element here is to ensure the optimal use of limited resources and to act with a spirit of serving humanity, rather than competition.

Distinguished participants, ,

Two days ago, I visited Granada, where I had the opportunity to view the most magnificent examples of Andalusian art and architectural heritage.

Andalusia historically played host to intellectuals like Ibn Rushd, like Ibn Firnas and like Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi, who made a direct contribution to the scientific, philosophical and cultural heritage of the Western world.

Another part of our common cultural heritage is Ibn Khaldun who was one of the pioneers of contemporary sciences, who spent a considerable part of his life in Andalusia in the 14th century and the 600th anniversary whose death was widely commemorated in Spain as well in 2006.

Our common history has been a struggle to establish a civilization of humanity, rather than a history of conflicts.

The Alhambra Palace is today a concrete example, not of our differences, but of our common heritage.

It is a responsibility for us all to keep our common heritage and our joint civilizational effort alive today.

Distinguished guests,

I would like to conclude my statement by thanking Spain for hosting this useful Forum and wishing all my friends every success in their efforts here today and tomorrow.

I am pleased to invite you all to Turkey next year on the occasion of the Second Forum.

I sincerely and respectfully greet you all.