



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Speech by the Vice-President of the Government, Minister for the Presidency and Spokesperson, at the Closing Ceremony of the 1st World Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations

Ladies and Gentlemen,

With this 1st Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, this year 2008 that is just beginning will undoubtedly be the year of the consolidation and expansion of an ambitious initiative that has been able to tune in to a demand that is widely shared throughout the world: that of promoting a global culture of respect and understanding, a culture that celebrates diversity as the greatest and best asset for progress and the peaceful coexistence of the world's peoples.

Throughout the working sessions held during these two days we have reiterated our willingness to eliminate divisions and divides among cultures and civilizations.

We have reaffirmed our conviction that, faced with all irrational extremisms, civilization can triumph if it chooses dialogue, justice and solidarity as solutions to shared problems.

We have worked so that the hope of a world of dignity for each person may be recognized and effective; not a dreamers' illusion but a reality for the over six billion inhabitants of this planet.

Good work has been done drafting concrete and practical proposals to fulfil the ideals of dialogue and understanding that prevail in the Alliance.

Thanks to these efforts, to the efforts made these days and in the preceding meetings, what was a project three years ago, when the initiative was launched, is today a reality with a promising future, as attested by the great many nations and organizations that form part of the Group of Friends of the Alliance, and the significant number of measures discussed and agreed during these days.

Our societies, cultures and civilizations are intrinsically plural, because diversity is inherent to humanity and it is the main source of learning and social progress.

Promoting plurality is the best antidote against the temptation of uniformity on the part of those intent on building monolithic, closed societies.

Pluralism of reasons and beliefs, of lifestyles and individual projects, is the mortar with which we build coexistence with freedom and respect. Pluralism, diversity, are essential prerequisites for the possibility of fruitful dialogue. And without such dialogue, civic conversation becomes a vacuous and impoverishing monologue which, instead of combating error by contrasting viewpoints, simply listens to the echo of its own voice.

If we take the diverse and plural nature of all human expression seriously, if we do not seek to hide it behind a pretentious uniformity of beliefs or views of the world, we must discard the so-called “clash of civilizations” as an implausible alternative, because civilizations are not closed or rigid, but open and porous.

The history of humankind, its progress, has been based on continual contact and exchanges. The origins of great breakthroughs in civilization such as writing, mathematics and the printing press correspond to diverse cultures and locations; they are the result of the progress of various civilizations throughout space and time.

This legacy of respect for diversity, of reciprocal learning and dialogue between those who are different, is what we wish to reaffirm as the best guarantee for progress and for peace among peoples.

We have the firm conviction that it is possible to promote the necessary understanding to sustain global ethics on the basis of which we can build the foundations of a new, fairer international order.

Ethics based on a framework of shared values, such as the equal dignity of every person and respect, without exception, for human rights.

Ethics that pervade the actions of States, both in their foreign and in their domestic policy. Because the reality of increasing global interdependence forces us to heighten our sensitivity to all that occurs in these new arenas created by globalization. Not as something “external” but as something more “internal” to the domestic policies of our countries.

In this respect, it is crucial that the principles inspiring the Alliance be reflected in our domestic policies through specific National Plans setting out specific measures to be implemented in various spheres.

Spain has undertaken this responsibility by approving over fifty actions in the fields of education, culture, youth, immigration and cooperation policy.

This is how we are expressing our commitment to the implementation of the Alliance, with the conviction that the more strongly it is rooted within the action and the performance of the members of the international community, the more effectively we shall advance towards attaining our goals. But in this task of extending bridges between cultures, religions and civilizations, civil society is called upon to play a role as important as that of States and international organizations. Intercultural dialogue must be a reality that is lived and perceived by the population, and so the diverse social actors need to be involved in working for the values of the Alliance.

This is especially so with respect to the media, which are so important in shaping public opinion. We must avoid bias and clichés in the presentation of cultural differences, and not allow the restating of simplistic prejudices to nourish mistrust and fear of what is different. Therefore, the proposals on communication issues that have been discussed during these last few days, such as setting up a Rapid Reaction Mechanism, an Information Centre or a Fund for the Production of Audiovisual Content, are especially relevant and promising for our shared future.

Because it is important not just to act upon the images of the present, but also on how we want to build what is yet to come, and it is in addressing this task that special attention should be paid to young people, to their opportunities, preventing them from falling prey to despair and resentment, and promoting an open, tolerant outlook.

Therefore, making youth policies a part of the Alliance programme is not just the right decision, but should be one of our top priorities.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Working for peaceful coexistence among cultures is a challenge of the highest magnitude on the international agenda. A challenge that is crucial to world security, to the security of us all.

And faced with this challenge, we must combine our forces, combine our wishes, and locate areas of common ground such as those that bring us together today.

The Alliance of Civilizations is the greatest project yet undertaken by the international community to bring about our ultimate goal of increasing the level of security throughout the world.

This goal, no doubt, is an ambitious one, but it is achievable, if together we decide to advance along the path of dialogue and tolerance, sincerely and without prejudice.

For this reason, I deeply regret that some, rather than adding their voices to those of people all over the world who are calling for peace and understanding, instead seek to revile and ridicule the work of those of us who are striving to make this peace and understanding a reality.

It is deplorable that some still believe that strengthening reason against unreason, preferring dialogue to ignorance and working for peace rather than confrontation is an illusion, just for dreamers. The truth is quite the contrary, and I am convinced that this is the path we must take. Doing so is an ethical and political obligation if we wish to build a better future for all, one in which there is a space for each and every one of us.

Everybody chooses just where they stand in this world, and we are quite clear about where we wish to be, on the side of those who work for peace, not war, and beside those who believe that the power of dialogue and reason is much stronger than that of non-communication and irrationality.

We know whose side we are on and we know what we want.

We want to overcome the artificiality of unbroachable differences, because the world is one – not just as a physical reality, but also as the result of an age-old process of exchange, contact and interdependence.

We want our shared values to help bridge the differences that would otherwise separate us.

We want the recognition of our differences to become, at the same time, the trademark of a shared identity.

I have no doubt in my mind that the Alliance is a fundamental element in the construction of friendly relations among countries, in developing and promoting respect for human rights and basic freedoms for all, and in reinforcing world peace.

This is our endeavour, and in achieving it we have taken a great step forward today. Spain, as a co-sponsor of the Alliance and a country that is firmly committed to its principles, will continue giving its active support to all the initiatives and proposals of the Alliance, as a genuine policy of State.

Thank you very much.