



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Address by H.M. Queen Noor at the Alliance of Civilizations Annual Forum

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Bismillah a Rahman a Raheem.

Prime Minister Zapatero, Prime Minister Erdogan, President Sampaio, Mr. Secretary General, dear friends:

The discussion we are engaged in today is critical, it is urgent, and it is, indeed, exciting. It is also very close to my heart. I am honored to join you for it, and I am very grateful to the UN Alliance of Civilizations, President Sampaio, to our host today, Prime Minister Zapatero, and to Shamil Idriss Acting Director of the Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat,

As an Arab-American by birth, granddaughter of orthodox Christian Arab immigrants to the US at the turn of the last century, I was raised in a Judeo-Christian society, embraced Islam and married a Hashemite direct descendant of the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH); I have been privileged to live at the center of two worlds that many believe are diametrically divided - East and West, forever apart, two civilizations in the midst of a fundamental clash.

Yet in the course of my work and my life, I have learned again and again that, in our hearts and souls – in what we fear, in what we seek, in what we need and what we love – there is a fundamental, common humanity that towers above our differences.

And so, everyday, I wrestle with the question of how to bridge this seeming gap that I know with all my being does not exist. How can we address, and ameliorate, the cross-cultural misunderstandings that contribute to, and oftentimes underlie, much of the instability, injustice, and violence that we see in the world today?

For a lifetime it seems, I have agonized at the way stereotypes, reinforced by popular culture and the media, can set the emotional and political stage for policies that result in chronic misunderstanding, suffering, humiliation, and conflict. Yet the media has the power to humanize, as well as polarize. And it needs to become a part of the solution, rather than part of the problem.

In this context, I am here as co-founder of the Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund, an unprecedented, not-for-profit initiative, formed out of a dynamic partnership between private media, the United Nations, and global philanthropists.

Our mission is to promote, support, and sustain media content that can enhance mutual understanding and respect within and among different societies and cultures. And today, we are announcing a \$100 million Fund to support the production and distribution of films that entertain as well as enlighten – films that will enhance the connections that already exist between different societies, but are seldom noted on screen and in popular culture.

With an initial investment of \$10 million from the Founding Board Members, the Fund has already established partnerships with many leaders in the entertainment and new media industries.

This past November, British entrepreneur Sir Richard Branson, who serves on our board of advisors, and I hosted an international summit of industry experts, world leaders such as Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and global philanthropists, who pledged their support and partnership.

Notable among our partners are:

Participant Productions - The leading provider of film entertainment which inspires and compels social change, among their films are *Syrianna*, *The Kite Runner*, and the groundbreaking *An Inconvenient Truth*;

International Creative Management, one of Hollywood's largest talent agencies;

Summit Entertainment, a leading international and domestic distributor of Hollywood films;

The largest and fastest growing online new media platform, YouTube, which plans a dedicated channel for Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund content; and

Academic partnerships focused on cutting edge scientific research on links between humiliation, marginalization and violence.

This is an exciting and impressive coalition, which I hope will grow in the coming months and years to include other partners, such as many of you represented here and from around the world.

I said earlier that this issue is close to my heart. And the truth is that it breaks my heart to know that children in Spain, in Jordan, and around the world may be internalizing the biases they see on film, about people who look different, and pray differently. Yet it gives me hope that our efforts will help these children see all that they share – their dreams, their hopes and their future.

We all know too well that the problems that divide us are not simply ones of perception. There are real political conflicts that require real political solutions.

Indeed, I know from the tireless efforts of my late husband that in trying to build peace, nothing substitutes for political will and courage.

And yet, I also know that we all have a part to play – not only political leaders, but religious leaders, corporate leaders, civil society leaders, and, yes, also media leaders.

They say that "perception is reality," and that "seeing is believing." So let us find a way to show the world something that will change their perceptions, and ultimately their actions, enabling the disparate people of this fragile globe to see the other as their sister, their brother.

Thank you.
Salaam Alaikum
Peace be with you