



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Research Base for the High-level Group Report

Analysis on Media

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Introduction

“It is time to recognize that the true tutors of our children are no longer the school teachers and university professors, but the filmmakers, advertising executives and pop culture purveyors. Disney does more than Duke, Spielberg outweighs Stanford, MTVtrumps MIT”.¹

1. Technology has made the media the most important immediate influence on opinions and understanding in the industrialized world and has significantly heightened media impact in the developing countries as well. Media has a powerful capacity to encourage global awareness thereby promoting cross-cultural understanding, tolerance and acceptance of ethnic, cultural, religious and gender differences in communities across the globe. Unfortunately, the media’s potential to be a force for good can easily backfire. By disseminating messages that create and reinforce negative stereotypes and perpetuate misconceptions, the media frustrates dialogue and works against mutual understanding.
2. While CNN and BBC World have fed the phenomenon of the 24-hour news cycle and helped to eliminate distance as a delaying factor in the reporting of news in the West, in the Middle East, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya satellite television have created a pan-Arab public sphere² and new political schooling. These developments have been amplified and accelerated by the Internet, which is allowing growing segments of the general population to access and be part of the new media, even in many developing countries.
3. The media is, therefore a crucial arena for challenging prevailing attitudes regarding the many “others” across the globe. Individuals do not simply hold intellectual beliefs about peoples in distant lands, but rather, they have strong emotional responses to divisions that are perpetuated in the media. One critical example is the influential idea of the clash of civilizations, which has spread out of the domain of news journalism and into all other forms of media.
4. No where has the reproduction of the so-called clash been more powerful than in the two media markets of the West and the Muslim world. Western cultural productions display negative portrayal of Arabs and Muslims and the conflicts among these societies illicit strong emotional responses in Western media consumers; similarly, media in the Muslim world have made the misperceptions about the West a daily phenomenon in news shows and popular entertainment.
5. To identify suitable measures for de-escalating extremism and encouraging constructive action, this paper focuses on two critical global societies. Beginning with an analysis of the media’s impact on relations between the West and predominantly Muslim societies the paper then draws conclusions based on this analysis for deeper consideration.

¹ Barber, Benjamin, Professor of Political Science, University of Maryland and author of Jihad vs. McWorld. Times Books, Random House, 1995 as cited by O. Amanat at May 13, 2006 AoC Working Meeting at the Mission of Qatar to the UN, New York, NY.

² Della Ratta, Donatella: Testimony to EU External Relations Committee 21-04-06.

For the purposes of this paper, the media is divided into two broad categories:

- 1) News or Journalistic Media
- 2) Entertainment Media (TV dramas and comedies, reality TV, film, documentaries, etc.)

6. Counter the strong emotional responses triggered by the prevailing mythologies, the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) must address both media arenas; supporting alternative messages in popular culture may be more effective at changing sentiments than news media that speaks to the audience at an intellectual level only. Each involves distinct means of production and each are subject to different sets of professional ethics and laws depending on where they are produced and disseminated.

7. At the same time, while appreciating the significant power of the media, it is important to recognize that people around the world can have an impact on the media. Where the media grossly distorts or withholds information, civil society may be able to take action such as barraging the media with letters or emails or boycotting the media corporations responsible for disseminating caricatures and misrepresentations.

1. Impact of Media on Muslim Populations: Insult on Top of Injury and Muslim Solidarity

1.1 *News Media Becoming an Increasingly Reliable Source of Information*

8. The impact of the news media in predominantly Muslim countries has traditionally been very limited – particularly in the Middle East, North Africa, and parts of sub-Saharan Africa, where government-controlled media outlets have provided censored information of which populations have learned to be highly skeptical. The news media in many predominantly Muslim countries has been less trusted and is rivaled by the mosque and the souk (marketplace) as a source for reliable information and opinion-formation.³

9. The dominance of religious or community sources over news media has begun to change as the development of regional satellite television stations in the Middle East and the easing of regulations on the press in many predominantly Muslim countries has begun to take place. This has resulted in a multiplication of sources for news and information available to Muslim populations and has provided attractive alternatives to what came before it: news media produced and distributed from Western perspectives and government controlled media presented from government perspectives.

³ Interview with Dr. Mamoun Fandy, Senior Fellow, United States Institute of Peace. April 21, 2006.

1.2 Heightened Awareness of and Solidarity with Muslims as Victims

10. This paper contends that the increased access of Muslim populations to information produced and disseminated by Muslim sources in recent years (through the development of popular regional satellite TV in the Arab world, the easing of press laws in some Muslim countries, and the penetration of the internet more deeply into Muslim societies even in developing countries) has had an important effect. It has raised popular awareness of events in such places as Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Chechnya through news stories often presented in ways that highlight the victimization of Muslim populations and that foster public sympathy and solidarity with fellow Muslims under occupation or other forms of oppression. The popular anger fostered by such media tends to be expressed toward Western powers viewed as perpetrating or supporting policies in these regions and the governments of Muslim countries that are viewed as either supportive or too weak to oppose them.

11. In exploring the impact of media on extremism in the contemporary Muslim world, a series of interviews with “failed” suicide bombers conducted by Nicole Argo reflected the power of news images of Muslim victimization. As one interviewee noted, “The difference between the first intifada (no suicide bombers) and the second is television. Before, I knew when we were attacked here, or in a nearby camp, but the reality of the attacks everywhere else was not so clear. Now, I cannot get away from Israel! The TV brings them into my living room, and you can’t turn the TV off. How could you live with yourself? At the same time, you can’t ignore the problem. What are you doing to protect your people? We live with an internal struggle. Whether you choose to fight or not, every day is this internal struggle.”⁴

1.3 Western-Produced Entertainment Media and Popular Resentment

12. The perceived *injury* against Muslims that is conveyed by the burgeoning press in predominantly Muslim countries is compounded by the *insult* of much of the entertainment media that is produced in the West, but broadcast and disseminated globally. Eighty per cent of movie theatres in Muslim countries show Hollywood films according to a recent study by the U.S. Council on Foreign Relations and yet, in a survey of 900 American feature films presenting Arab characters the overwhelming majority of them were found to be outright racist or essentialized caricatures.⁵ Positive, normalizing images of ordinary Arabs or Muslims are almost non-existent in Western mass media, which is to say, globalized media.

13. Moreover, the Western TV programs and films that are most popular in the Muslim world reflect none of the identities of these regions and encourage emulation of superficially understood Western fashions and personalities. As Daoud Kuttab, director of the Institute of Modern Media at Al-Quds University in Ramallah asks, “Where are the

⁴ Argo, Nicole: Interview with Hisham (38), PFLP, Gaza; 2001 Conference Paper: “Understanding and Defusing Human Bombs: the Palestinian Case” International Studies Association, Montreal, 2004.

⁵ Sheehan, Jack. Reel Bad Arabs: How Hollywood Vilifies a People; Olive Branch Press, 2001.

alternative media outlets, films and heroes that reflect this region's rich culture and traditions?"⁶

14. While this phenomenon may appear purely a cultural one, there are important psychological effects on populations that persistently view demeaning images of themselves in the media. As noted by famed sociologist Peter Berger, the leading theorist of social constructionism, individuals, especially members of minority groups, derive much of their self-esteem from media images of themselves or people like themselves – perhaps even more than they do from their own personal interactions with others.⁷

15. The impact of the *insult* (popular entertainment media that is disrespectful toward Islam and Muslims) on top of the *injury* (news of Muslim victimization told from a Muslim perspective) is to feed a humiliation, resentment, and even rage in much of the Muslim world against Western sources of both policy and what is viewed as propaganda aimed at Islam and Muslims. The result of this rage became evident with the furor that erupted in late 2005 and early 2006 over cartoons that were printed in a relatively obscure newspaper in Denmark.⁸ Months before that crisis unfolded, the Gallup polling agency asked in a survey of popular attitudes in ten predominantly Muslim countries what the West could do to improve relations with the Muslim world. The single greatest response, at 47% of total respondents, suggested that the West “stop disrespecting Islam” and “stop portraying Muslims as inferior in its media.”⁹

16. Making the link between this widely-held perception of humiliation and the fostering of extremist attitudes is not difficult. As noted by Professor Shibley Telhami, Anwar Sadat Professor for Peace and Development at the University of Maryland and Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution in his book, *The Stakes*, "To succeed, terror organizers, regardless of their aims, need to recruit willing members, raise funds, and appeal to public opinion in pursuit of their political objectives. *Public despair and humiliation are often fertile ground for terror organizers to exploit.*"¹⁰ (emphasis added)

17. In sum, the message that Muslims are inferior and are being treated as such is conveyed through an increasingly ever-present mixture of both news and popular entertainment media.

⁶ See: Kuttab, Daoud: The West and the Arab world: The case of media. Nov. 5, 2004. Available online at www.commongroundnews.org/article.php?mode=3&id=431&sid=0, retrieved on November 3 2006.

⁷ See: Berger, Peter, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* by Peter L. Berger, Thomas Luckmann, First Anchor Books, 1966, and related articles by same.

⁸ See: Annex I on Danish Cartoon Controversy.

⁹ “One Billion Muslim Voices” Gallup poll of 10,000 total respondents in Egypt, Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Morocco, and Indonesia.

¹⁰ Telhami, Shibley, *The Stakes: America and the Middle East*. Westview Press, 2002, pg. 14.

1.4 Entertainment Media Produced in the Muslim World & the Global Market

18. Entertainment media in some predominantly Muslim countries is vibrant and international though everywhere it competes with ubiquitous Western film, TV, and other cultural products. The Nigerian film and television industry provides much of the video market in sub-Saharan Africa, though with content of debatable quality. The Egyptian TV market is strong with regional distribution and broadcasting. The Iranian film industry is among the most respected in the world. Nevertheless, all of these production centers, and most centers for cultural production and distribution in the Muslim world, face tremendous barriers in reaching into the global market and especially in finding venues to be presented in the West. The reasons for this are fully explored in a working paper titled “Cultural Exchanges Between the West and Predominantly Muslim Countries” developed by the AoC Secretariat with the firm AEA Consulting, which is attached in Appendix II. However two reasons bear mentioning here as they help explain why and how the media does or does not reach Western audiences.

19. First, significant barriers to cross-cultural exchange and cooperation were erected in the West (most notably the U.S. Patriot Act) following terrorist activities in the U.S. and Europe. These barriers have made it risky for donors and organizations interested in facilitating exchanges. Some have gone out of business or shifted to facilitating exchanges with other regions of the world. A recent survey of all cultural exchanges funded in the West, for example, reveals that the region with which the most exchange occurs is Europe (30% of all funded exchanges) while the lowest is the Middle East (with 6% of all funded exchanges).¹¹ Moreover, the political climate in which such legislation is passed has established an environment in which it is difficult, for example, for Al-Jazeera to obtain the broadcasting license and channel necessary to air in the US and Canada.

20. Second, market forces limit what is broadcast and exchanged in both directions (from the West to predominantly Muslim countries and vice versa). When the viability of cultural exchanges is determined by whether a given broadcast, exhibit, or product can draw enough interest to cover costs or make a profit, and the pressure is to do so almost immediately or be dropped, it is too great of a risk for theaters, museums, and broadcasters to invest in media or culture other than those that are viewed as “sure things”. This helps explain why only the most base sensationalistic products go from the West abroad and, except for high art, it is so hard for other forms of culture to break through in the West.

¹¹ See: Appendix II, “Cultural Exchanges Between the West and Predominantly Muslim Countries”, prepared by the AoC Secretariat with primary contributions from AEA Consulting.

1.5 Free Press and Free Market Forces

21. It should also be noted that the news model in much of the Muslim world is confronted by political and social forces. In some places the media is restricted by state-sanctioned guidelines that result in narrow portrayals and a less diverse array of perspectives and information. There is both more overt official and self-censorship within the media than is found in the West. Intra- and inter-regional issues tend to be presented through filters of Islamic or pan-Arab identity and a rejection of Western - especially American - foreign policies. Elsewhere, government control is easing and there is a new diversity of media outlets.

22. However, even in some countries where governments have eased controls, a new phase in the evolution of new media is emerging: While the media is not fully state controlled, it is also not completely free. As individuals and media corporations take over television stations and newspapers from the control of government information ministries, media content now is often driven by money, ownership, and political power. This is reflected in the significant gap between the costs of independent or semi-free media and the money generated from commercial advertising. For example, the annual cost of operation of all Arab media from Morocco to Oman is \$17 billion, while net advertising spending in Gulf States did not exceed \$3 billion in 2004.¹² In such an environment, there is little opportunity for new media outlets to succeed unless massively subsidized by wealthy individuals, groups, or governments.

23. In some Muslim countries where there is a more established tradition of independent media, such as in Southeast Asia, or where there has been significant loosening of government control of the media, such as Turkey, similar commercial pressures to those which confront Western media have developed. While the liberalization of press laws in Turkey in the 90s led to the proliferation of print media outlets, the quality of news and information provided by the outlets is arguably worse than it was prior to that process of liberalization, as papers have raced to attract readers with sensationalist stories and shock-value reporting. As one Turkish corporate executive and media expert noted, it is a general rule that the media is one field in which free-market competition does not necessarily lead to increased quality – the race to attract viewers or readers in a newly liberalized media environment is often a race to the bottom, not a race to the top.¹³ These market forces, both in the West and in those Muslim countries where market forces apply to the media, lead directly to more sensationalistic and “populist” coverage of events.

24. In parts of the Muslim World, this populist-oriented programming, broadcast to viewers with strongly held perceptions of victimization and humiliation at the hands of Western powers, leads to a nationalistic orientation that is sometimes turned on non-Muslims. There is also re-enforcement of anti-Western, especially anti-Jewish (based on Israeli-Palestinian conflict but now generalized broadly) sentiment reflected in the media

¹² Author interview with major advertising mogul in Lebanon Antoine Chauri, February 12, 2005

¹³ Author interview with Ahmet Oren of Ihlas Holding, May 3, 2005.

in many Muslim countries¹⁴. The media's influence is imprecisely quantifiable but undeniable: in Pakistan a Catholic church commission counted 1,300 incidents of gross anti-minority inaccuracy, stereotyping and hate speech reported in four Urdu-language national dailies during mid-2005, culminating in the burning of several Catholic churches in November 2005.¹⁵

2. Impact of Media on Western Populations: Fear and Reinforced Stereotypes

25. News media in the U.S. and Western Europe have traditionally been more trusted by their populations than their counterparts in predominantly Muslim countries, largely due to a longer history of independence from the State. Whereas in Europe news media outlets (particularly the print press) have been explicitly linked to one political ideology or another with the notion that multiple perspectives provide an overall balance, in the US the media has traditionally presented itself as objective.

2.1 Nationalism and Populism

26. Much has changed since September 11, 2001. In the U.S. a more nationalistic sentiment in the news has become evident. Less critical press approach in the lead-up to the Iraq war, the controversial practice of "embedding" journalists with invading soldiers, the scandal in coverage of the U.S. administration's claims leading up to the war at the most respected media outlets in the U.S., including the New York Times have all been well-documented. Even in more mundane ways, the shift in media approach after September 11 was clear, complete with on-screen flying flag logos and patriotic lapel-pins worn by news anchors.¹⁶ At the same time, there have developed competing versions of "objective", with politically conservative media emerging, claiming that it is countering what it says has always been a liberal and even "un-American" bias in the news media. All of these developments took place in the context of news media competing for popular appeal in a time of heightened nationalism and xenophobia – not unlike the dynamics in some European countries around the Danish cartoon crisis.

27. As is the case in newly-liberated media environments as noted above, a relatively recent development of news outlets being expected to turn profits has driven news

¹⁴ This is evidenced by the reluctance of many broadcasters to air talk shows with prominent Jewish figures, and by the criticism faced by those stations, such as al-Jazeera, which have taken the lead in presenting talk shows with Jewish guests and commentators.

¹⁵ Waqar, Ali: Hate mongering worries minorities. The Daily Times, April 25, 2006. Available online at www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2006%5C04%5C25%5Cstory_25-4-2006_pg7_26, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

¹⁶ CBS News anchor Dan Rather drew strong popular criticism after stating in a CNN interview on September 22, 2001 that he would not wear an American flag pin during his broadcast as many other news anchors were doing, saying, "It just doesn't feel right."

producers to present superficial or incomplete information, repeat stereotypes, and highlight conflict without context to attract maximum audiences and to fill a demanding 24-hour news cycle created by the emergence of CNN and its rivals.¹⁷ Moral panics¹⁸ fill the sensational frame: with regard to coverage of the Muslim world, reports about the threat of radical Islam become newsworthy; reports of diverse communities living together are omitted. Media owners' bias and journalists' unfamiliarity with Muslim cultures further distort the agenda when it comes to covering the Muslim world.

28. The media magnification of extremism is nowhere more challenging than at the intersection of religion and politics. Americans, for example, are inundated with television news about Islam, Muslims and Arabs. But the coverage, says Arab politics professor Samer Shehata, "is dominated by the Iraq War, Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, terrorism and beheadings."¹⁹ In this all-bad news, Islam has become synonymous with jihad and jihad is understood as irrational, unjustified, religiously-based violence usually against non-Muslims. This equation of Islam with extremism has also been fueled by the false perception, often unclarified in the media, that traditional form of dress for Muslim women is a sign of the oppression of women.

2.2 Entertainment Media in the West

29. These anti-Muslim views are compounded by the entertainment media, the content of which has been noted – in general, dominant Western entertainment media productions thrive on magnified stereotypes of both the West and Muslim cultures, and while they feed consumers' hunger for entertainment they starve them of understanding. While this programming serves to further humiliation and anger in the Muslim world, its impact on Western non-Muslims tends to be a hardening of their stereotypes of Islam and a dehumanization of Muslims.

2.3 Stereotypes and Fear

30. Americans, who watch more television serials than news, documentaries or educational television, have been barraged since September 11, 2001 with television dramas about terrorism and counter-terrorist agencies. The majority of these entertainment programs rarely portray Arabs or Muslims as anything other than terrorists or somehow related to stories about terrorism.²⁰ The permanent images formed of

¹⁷ Seib, Philip: The news media and the clash of civilizations. *Parameters* 34 (Winter 2004-2005). Available online at: <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usawc/parameters/04winter/seib.pdf>, retrieved on November 6, 2006).

¹⁸ See: Ter Wal, Jessica: Racism and Cultural diversity in the Mass Media. European Research Centre on Migration and Ethnic Relations. European Monitoring Centre. Vienna 2002. *And see:* Khattab, Umi: Gee, is anti-God anti-government? Moral panic in Malaysia. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, 2002.

¹⁹ Shehata, Samer S: Professor of Arab Politics at Georgetown University Centre for Contemporary Arab Studies, cited in James, Bonnie: Negative American views about Islam. *Gulf Times*, 16-4-06. Also available at Pew Research Centre for the People and the Press.

²⁰ Shehata, in James, *op cit*.

Muslims by many Americans is negative. Almost all opinion polling over the past three years show that a large percentage of Americans believe that Islam encourages violence.²¹ A 2005 poll by the Pew Research Center for the People & The Press found that 36 percent of non-Muslim Americans say that Islam is more likely to encourage violence among its followers compared to other religions.²²

2.4 Fewer Owners, Fewer Perspectives

31. Moreover the profit motive has driven a consolidation of Western media ownership, which in turn restricts the perspectives from which the media is presented. As noted by media mogul Ted Turner, the largest media companies own “not only broadcast networks and local stations; they also own the cable companies that pipe in the signals of their competitors and the studios that produce most of the programming. To get a flavor of how consolidated the industry has become, consider this: In 1990, the major broadcast networks – ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox – fully or partially owned just 12.5% of the new series aired. By 2000, it was 56.3%. Just two years later, it has surged to 77.5%.”²³ This process of consolidation raises concerns about the effect it is having on the diversity of opinions and perspectives offered in the media as well as the barriers to entry of new competing media companies which, as Turner noted, “get gobbled up by one of the big companies or driven out of business altogether”.

3. The Internet and the Digital Revolution

32. Accompanying these trends in both the West and in the Muslim world is the advent of “new media”. The internet and new media technologies – particularly the development of digital media production and distribution - have opened new avenues for media consumers to become media producers and disseminators. It is difficult for generations born before 1980 to grasp the import of this development. Its power and potential impact for social causes can be compared to what Martin Luther King noted during the time of civil rights era, “There is a new medium that has been invented called the Television and through it we are going to show...the brutality of what we have been facing for all of our lives.”²⁴ A similar statement could be made today.

33. Such media is particularly effective in reaching youth populations. A Business Week article reported that "Fifteen- to eighteen-year-olds average nearly 6 1/2 hours a day watching TV, playing video games, and surfing the Net, according to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation survey. A quarter of that time, they're multitasking. The biggest

²¹ Shehata, in James, *op cit*.

²² “Views of Muslim-Americans Hold Steady After London Bombings.” Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, July 26, 2005.

²³ *Washington Monthly*, July/August 2004.

²⁴ Speech delivered by Martin Luther King, Jr in Birmingham, AL in 1962.

increase: computer use for activities such as social networking, which has soared nearly threefold since 2000, to 1 hour and 22 minutes a day on average.”²⁵

34. One example of the venues that exist for the production and dissemination of new media provides a glimpse into its power and potential: the membership of the youth-oriented dialogue and exchange website www.MySpace.com quadrupled to 40 million members over the course of 2005 alone, landing the site as number 15 on the entire U.S. Internet in terms of page hits according to Nielsen/NetRatings.²⁶ According to CNN, membership grew further to 60 million as of April 2006²⁷ and the site was recently ranked the “sixth most visited site on the internet by one global web-traffic tracking agency”.²⁸ This website is one of many sites on the internet where people from around the world interact and share music, videos, and other information. Home-made videos and other media products that gather interest and capture widespread attention on such sites draw enough attention to rival that of most major media outlets, and in fact often end up broadcast through traditional media outlets as a result. As further indication of the power of this medium, the parent company of www.MySpace.com, Intermix Media, was purchased in July 2005 for \$580 million by Rupert Murdoch.²⁹

4. What Can Be Done

35. Notwithstanding the polarizing effect that much of the media is having on relations between the West and the Muslim World, the media is one of the most fertile grounds for action that could reach broad populations.

36. Both media which have recently been liberated from direct government control and the realm of new media provide opportunities for the Alliance of Civilizations. These are avenues through which the Alliance of Civilizations could work to encourage media accountability, to advance alternative interpretations and perspectives on events, and to provide platforms for constructive voices that might otherwise get ignored. At the same time, to have large-scale impact, the Alliance should seek to work with the major established media outlets as well.

37. Beyond leadership however, the news media requires substantially more direct attention. This begins with the sector’s journalists themselves. There is an urgent need to reduce their intercultural ignorance through face-to-face encounters and familiarization, as well as through exchanges and skills sharing.

38. There should also be support for increased independence and diversity among media outlets in the Islamic world, and vigilance against bias in Western media. The

²⁵ “The MySpace Generation”, BusinessWeek Online, cover story, December 12, 2005.

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ “MySpace.com Posts Safety Ads”, CNN.com, April 11, 2006.

²⁸ Alexa’s Webtraffic Ranking, http://www.alexa.com/site/ds/top_500, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

²⁹ “The MySpace Generation”, BusinessWeek Online, cover story, December 12, 2005.

impact of such initiatives will depend upon media executives and owners opening newsrooms and agencies to these efforts. To take full advantage of this groundbreaking opportunity, funding and expansion for increasing internet access to populations not currently served is critical.

39. Finally, it should be noted that major efforts are underway in some of the areas suggested below for action. Most notably, the Rabat Conference on Fostering Dialogues Among Cultures and Civilizations, held June 14-16, 2005 with the support of UNESCO, the OIC, ISESCO, ALECSO, the Danish Centre for Culture and Development, and the Euromed Anna Lindh Foundation, resulted in a number of related recommendations in the fields of education and media, particularly news media. However, while some important commitments were made post-Rabat by, for instance, UNESCO to integrate much of the resulting recommendations into its existing funding or programs, and by the DCCD to launch pilot initiatives for journalist training, cross-cultural journalist exchanges and professional “twinning”, the implementation of the Rabat action plan has otherwise been hindered. This has been the result of the absence of other specific commitments by states and partners and the lack of a sustained program of monitoring of initiatives, including a follow-up conference to report progress which was originally scheduled for Copenhagen in 2006 but is now considered unlikely. In light of this, and in consultations with media professionals and activists from Southeast Asia, the Middle East, Europe, the US, and from UNESCO and UNICEF, including several directly engaged in the Rabat conference, the Alliance Secretariat has been encouraged that the following important issues noted below would be most welcome and are put forward for deeper consideration on the base of this analysis and as a conclusion of this paper

1) *Establish An Alliance of Civilizations Network of Media Activists and Centers³⁰ to Stimulate, Monitor, & Reward Media*

40. A Center or, more likely, a Network of existing centers and activists based in the Middle East, Southeast Asia, the US, and Europe, should be established to *produce* media content with more constructive perspectives, to *monitor* inflammatory media reporting, and to *award* examples of professional and constructive media coverage of issues pertinent to relations between the Muslim World and the West. The center should benefit from past lessons learned when agencies and governments work together on similar initiatives. In particular, different government regulations could complicate the uniformity of the different satellite centers around the world. This center or network would take on three specific tasks:

- A. Rapid Reaction Commentary: The Center or Network could create and disseminate *rapid-reaction commentaries, editorials, and video commentaries* promoting understanding and constructive perspectives on current Islamic-West controversies. The purpose would be to help frame the understanding of issues

³⁰ A number of institutions have expressed interest in participating in such a network, including universities in the process of developing related initiatives.

related to Islamic-Western relations, particularly in "teachable moments" when relations between Western and predominantly Muslim societies are in the news worldwide (i.e. in the months of the Danish cartoon crisis, following the controversy around the death sentence handed down and then rescinded on the Afghan convert to Christianity, and after the Nigerian stoning story two years ago, etc.). Two to three events of this type occur every year, leading media outlets to scramble for content to help contextualize and present the issues. The way in which they are framed by the media both in the West and in predominantly Muslim countries significantly impacts whether populations and even policy-makers think in constructive or polarizing ways about their relevance and meaning. Op-ed pieces could be drafted by junior writers to be signed (and co-signed) by senior figures in the West and in predominantly Muslim countries (perhaps including HLG members), quickly translated into major languages (French, English, Arabic, Urdu, and Bahasa Indonesia for example), and distributed to editors of major newspapers around the world for printing. The prominence of the signatories, the timeliness with which they are provided, and the provision of articles in local languages would help maximize publication and republication of such pieces. Successful models of such systems exist,³¹ but not on the global scale or with the level of senior authorship that the Alliance could generate. A similar mechanism using video interviews distributable to TV-News outlets via the internet could also be mobilized.

- B. Media Watch: The Center or Network could commence monitoring influential and popular media coverage of Islamic-West issues for grossly inaccurate, pejorative, and other irresponsible incidents with recommendations and best practices on how to counteract them.³² The monitor should seek inputs from existing monitors such as the recently-created Organization of the Islamic Conference initiative, the European Union's Monitoring Centre for Racism and Xenophobia,³³ and the European Day of Media Monitoring exercise³⁴. The regular "media watch" report should be of sufficiently prestigious research, independence and journalism quality for inclusion in international journalism, public affairs, faith and religion, and other publications and websites with a stake in dialogue.

³¹ <http://www.commongroundnews.org/index.php?sid=1&lang=en>, retrieved on November 6, 2006. And see: http://www.sfcg.org/resources/resources_pih.html, retrieved on November 2006 - the CGNews Service was endorsed by the World Economic Forum's Council of 100 Leaders: West-Islamic World Dialogue Initiative and operates in English, Bahasa-Indonesia, and Arabic.

³² See: What can a word do? Materials of Armenian, Azerbaijani and Georgia Press Analysis. Available in English and Russian on Media diversity Institute site, Resources section. Available at: www.media-diversity.org, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

³³ http://eumc.eu.int/eumc/index.php?fuseaction=content.dsp_cat_content&catid=2, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

³⁴ European Day of Media Monitoring (of minorities and media portrayal). Available online at: <http://www.multicultural.net/edmm/index.htm>, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

- C. Media Award: Media monitors could refer examples of constructive and positive media coverage to a separate advisory panel to regularly award journalists and media outlets for distinguished contributions to cross-cultural understanding. The high-profile award program could collaborate with existing awards such as the European Union's Anna Lindh European-Mediterranean Foundation for Dialogue Between Cultures journalist prize,³⁵ or the European CIVIS prize,³⁶ or separately recognize gender, specific regions and faith and values reporting of relevance to relations between the West and the Muslim World. A separate award for the empowerment of women could also be considered. These awards will be for outstanding achievement in addressing women's issues within the Arab media; this award should also stimulate media coverage. (this suggestion comes from the Media On-line Dialogue)

2) Open Access to Educational Media Programming

41. The Alliance could support the dissemination of non-sensationalistic and educational media program by assisting under-resourced Islamic-world satellite broadcasters to access Western programming of broad appeal and educational content. Broadcasters are eager for such programming to fill gaps in their airtime but lack acquisition rights and translated material from Discovery Channel, National Geographic, various public broadcasters, specialty channels such as Vision Television (Canada), togetherTV, and any programming offering interactivity.

3) Strengthen the Capacity of Media Professionals to Cover the Intersection of Religion and Politics and to Cover Stories across Western-Muslim Societies

42. There is a need to accelerate professional skills development to keep pace with the emergence of new media outlets in the Islamic world and to instill more sensitivity to overcoming stereotypes, resisting sensationalizing and telling important stories creatively in reporters both in the West and in the Muslim World. Moreover, intercultural competence requires new curricula in journalism schools, new career development resources, and new ethical guidelines and accountability mechanisms focused on cross-cultural sensitization. There is also a need to recognize the perception of double standards, where the suffering of one community is featured in its media but critiqued by others as a manipulation of popular sentiments. Many in the West have criticized the emphasis of suffering of Arabs and Muslims on Arab satellite stations but are unaware that repeated broadcasts of American servicemen in 1993 in Mogadishu had similar effects on their own population.

- A. Journalist Training: Journalistic training is required to reduce ill-informed intercultural media reports that repeat stereotypes and emphasize extremes. Modules and full programs in training culturally-informed and sensitive reporting should

³⁵ See: <http://www.euromedalex.org/Prize/index.html>, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

³⁶ See: http://www.wdr.de/tv/civis/03civis00_en.phtml, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

be developed with the advice of organizations such as the Media Diversity Institute³⁷ and leading international organizations such as the Institute for War and Peace Reporting, Panos-Paris, Internews and Press Now, all of which provide journalism capacity-development in a number of countries already. Supporting placement of Arab women journalists in the non-Arab world could also encourage the development and progression of Arab women in the media. (*from the online dialogue*). To sensitize western journalists to Muslim cultural values and appropriate language a reputable in-career training center such as the Poynter Institute³⁸ which has previously challenged gender and racial disparities in newsrooms and news, should be invited to partner with counterparts to develop cross-cultural sensitivity training. *In all cases, training must include senior editors and managers.*

- B. Materials on the Intersection of Religion and Politics: The Media Diversity Institute should be invited to adapt its journalism best-practices manuals for Western journalists reporting on issues related to Islam and Muslim populations to include items such as historical references, basic understanding of secularism, fundamentalism, faith and law, both internationally and within regions. Distribution should include press associations, journalism schools, human rights groups and specific cultural communities.

- C. Journalism School Curriculum: The UN's UPEACE University in Costa Rica, which already offers a degree course in conflict-sensitive reporting, should be invited to lead a consortium of journalism schools in the West to respond to the paucity of formal instruction in understanding and reporting on Muslim-West issues, by developing specific courses for journalism student training and curriculum development workshops or grants for journalism school faculty. The Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California is prepared to begin drafting curricula immediately that would teach journalists-in-training the history of Islamic societies and the complexities of contemporary Islamic movements. Curricula should also include modules on Islam and women. (*from the on-line dialogue*)

4) Support the Development, Articulation, and Implementation of Professional Media Standards

43. Calling for the establishment of a Code of Conduct for journalists risks arbitrary interpretation by licensing authorities within individual states for partisan purposes, and conflicts with the concept of free expression underlying media rights in many countries. However, standards have been developed which cover many of the concerns related to the state of cross-cultural media coverage, including the International Federation of

³⁷ <http://www.media-diversity.org/>, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

³⁸ The Poynter Institute is already considering the development of an online course for journalists in need of information on how to write about Muslims and Islam.

Journalists' code³⁹, and are voluntarily pursued in many countries today. High Level Group members and other prominent individuals are encouraged to make a moral call to the media to take their responsibility of their powerful profession seriously. Non-partisan journalists' associations would be logical partners for considering adoption or modification of such codes to for inclusion in their own codes of practice.

A. Urge and Support the Convening of Professional Press Syndicates to Articulate Standards of Ethical Media Practices

In many countries where media professionals are experiencing a liberalization of laws governing their profession, the question of how to establish and implement professional standards of ethical conduct is an issue. Rather than calling for universal codes of conduct for the media, the Alliance should call for and support the convening of press syndicates to articulate professional standards and mechanisms for fostering a professional culture in which those standards are adhered to.

B. Convene Legislators Concerned with Press Laws, Media Owners, Journalism School Leaders, and Religious Leaders In Order to Facilitate Greater Consensus on the Lines Between Free Speech and Hate Speech in Diverse Societies

Free speech is nowhere absolute. Notwithstanding legitimate concerns among media professionals that government bodies not restrict their range of action for political purposes, any diverse society must regularly revisit the lines it draws in its legislation and within its editorial decision-making processes, over where to draw the line between free speech and that speech which foments hatred or even violence against others. The Alliance should call for legislators and media professionals to meet periodically to examine, for example, whether the laws that have been established to protect against racist or anti-Semitic media must now be extended to protect against similar hate speech directed at Muslims and Islam in the West.

5) ***Reduce Cross-Cultural Isolation and Develop a Global Consciousness Among Media Professionals***

44. There is an urgent need to reduce the intercultural ignorance of news media professionals – this can best be accomplished via face-to-face encounters, skills-sharing, and familiarization with fellow-professionals across cultures.

Expand Reciprocal Extended Exchanges of Media Professionals in the West and Counterpart in Predominantly Muslim Countries

To reduce intercultural ignorance and isolation, which is reflected in media reporting, journalists of specific skills assignments which intersect Islamic-West issues, such as religion and faith, immigration, human rights and politics, should

³⁹ <http://www.ifj.org/default.asp?Issue=ETHICS&Language=EN>, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

have access to interchange, joint conferences⁴⁰ and possibly permanent councils on reporting on the Islamic-Western relations. The initiative⁴¹ of the Malaysian government to create an Islamic Centre for Journalism Training, with invitations to non-Muslim journalists to participate, should be considered for possible support. An international conference comparing and examining instances of Islamophobia and xenophobia in Western media reporting with their counterparts in the media of predominantly Muslim countries should be held under the auspices of the International Federation of Journalists or similar interests, as a launching point for smaller exchanges among specialist journalists. Existing professional and scholarship programs such as the program of the International Centre for Journalism which brings Muslim reporters to Western locations and vice versa for extended work exchanges should be substantially increased.

6) Urge Responsible Political and Cultural Leadership Vis-à-vis the Media

45. As the Indonesian response to the Danish cartoons controversy demonstrated⁴², cultural and political leaders of good will can seize the opportunities the media presents before they are commandeered by voices of extremism. Individually and through joint statements and appearances, leaders of moderation need be constrained only by honesty and civility in displacing diatribes and violence as the dominant media focus. The Alliance could play a galvanizing role in supporting such efforts through the rapid reaction commentary service noted above and through popularizing examples of constructive use of the media by leaders.

Research and Disseminate Case Studies of the Constructive Use of Media Outlets by Political and Cultural Leaders in Times of Crisis

The Alliance could commission a series of briefing papers on the responsible use of media outlets by political, cultural, and media professionals in times of heightened tension and conflict to quell popular sentiments and to limit violence. The case studies could be analyzed with a view to establishing and disseminating to policy advisors, diplomatic training institutes, schools of religious instruction and public policy, and to civil society leaders on a set of best practices in the use of media by responsible political, cultural, and community leaders in times of crisis.⁴³

⁴⁰ See: Euromed and the Media Program of the European Union's European-Mediterranean partnership. Available online at: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/external_relations/euromed/media/index.htm, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

⁴¹ See: Malaysian government proposes Islamic journalism centre, May 3, 2006 Available online at www.ijnet.org/Director.aspx?p=Article&ID=304931&Prn=Y, retrieved on November 6, 2006. Also see: Arab Journalists Sure Centre Can Change Western Perception, May 2, 2006. Available online at: www.bernama.com.my/bernama/v3, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

⁴² See: Appendix I to this paper, "The Danish Cartoon Controversy and the Role of Cultural and Political Leadership" for a brief description of the steps taken in Indonesia by political, religious, and media leaders to guard against inflaming emotions and violence during the Danish cartoon crisis.

⁴³ Examples and some case studies already abound covering, for example, statements and actions taken in Sweden and Indonesia during the Danish cartoon crisis, the use of radio in Burundi to limit mass hysteria and violent outbreaks during the Rwanda genocide, etc.

7) *Enlist the Support and Partnership of Mass Media Leaders*

46. To be successful, efforts to engage the mass media, either in the news or in the entertainment fields, should be approached from a perspective of seeking partnership with them, rather than simply monitoring or seeking to admonish them. The existing media monitoring mechanisms set up by the European Commission and by several universities can provide case studies for best practices. The Alliance should also take advantage of high profile events such as the World Cup.

A. Impress Upon Hollywood Script-Writers and Producers the Impact They Can Have and Invite Their Support in Countering Extremism

Efforts are already underway, led by the Harvard School of Public Health, media mogul Omar Amanat, and the East-West Institute to research the effects of popular media on self-esteem and violence in the Muslim World, drawing on similar research conducted on the African American experience in the 1960s and 1970s. Fewer than 200 Hollywood producers and script-writers have been identified as responsible for much of the production of the TV and film industry of Hollywood. Individual meetings are to be held once the sociological and health research has been completed. The Alliance should seriously consider providing its auspices for a meeting of these Hollywood professionals together with the researchers and public health advocates involved to discuss the impact of film and TV on attitudes and behavior and to invite their input and ideas on how the portrayal of normalized Muslim characters in popular media might have an impact both in predominantly Muslim societies and in Western countries. Hollywood celebrities who serve as UN Goodwill Ambassadors could be asked to help in the convening of the meeting and in generating publicity around its conclusions.

B. Enlist the Support of Owners of Major Media Owners

The effects of trainings and exchanges involving media professionals are often undercut by the fact that they operate within editorial lines that are set by senior editors, publishers, and owners. To be effective in enlisting the support of media, the Alliance must reach media conglomerate owners and executives (i.e. BBC, CNN, NBC, Fox, al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya), state media directors and regulators to provide both the space and the resources for media professionals to act. An organization such as the World Editors Forum and regional counterparts should be invited to convene an examination of media misportrayal and manipulation from owners' perspectives. Participants should include regulators, a very few senior journalists and a diverse group of theologian-analysts, with a view to generating support for more positive reporting of Islam-West issues that could in turn be conveyed to media managers and professionals.

8) *Strengthen Muslim World-West Pop-Culture Collaboration*

47. Work with Public and Private Donors to Establish a Fund for Media Aimed at Improving People-to-People Relations Between the Muslim World and the West

Any media format can be used to divide or unite communities. Pioneering efforts to use soap operas, talk shows, children’s programming, and call-in programming to shift attitudes and even behavior have proven successful in a wide variety of cultural settings.⁴⁴ The Alliance should convene a coalition of public and private donors interested in media and/or in Islamic-Western relations to establish a catalytic fund for intercultural media development. Funds could support producers and innovators of media with educational content and cultural entertainment focused on common values and demonstrations of dialogue, cooperation, or commonality between the Muslim world and the West. By providing funds for pilot programs, which in turn can be shown to broadcasters and, if successful, lead to full funding for series, such a fund could serve a catalyst for media programming without having to invest the much large funds needed for entire series or broadcasts. Such a fund could prioritize four kinds of media production:

- i. *Support producers who have obtained a broadcaster’s support and are engaged in a joint venture or co-production across cultural or religious lines.* Priority could be given to productions addressing central misperceptions or pressing cultural issues, such as headscarves, secularism, and the line between free speech and hate speech and those that use creative and popular means to reach the largest possible populations.⁴⁵ The work of Activevoice Productions in San Francisco is one example.⁴⁶ The company makes films “that open eyes, hearts and minds about critical social issues not covered in depth by the mainstream media,” such as immigration, youth justice and helping employees at diverse workplaces push past stereotypes about Muslims worldwide. Partnerships with local producers and outlets sensitive to the indigenous social-political context should be one key criterion.

⁴⁴ Largely pioneered in the public health field by organizations such as Population Services International as a means to educate populations about health risks and the steps to take to avoid them, an entire field of “intended outcome programming” developed in the 1990’s. Intended outcome programming relies on sociologists and community activists to identify the attitudes and prejudices underlying destructive behavior in a community (for instance racist or ethnic hatreds), and to suggest the kinds of experiences and lessons that might mitigate such attitudes. Script-writers, actors, and producers are then engaged to develop popular-format programming that integrates these lessons into, for instance, soap opera scripts or reality TV scenarios. Evaluations of such programming in regions as diverse as the Balkans, sub-Saharan Africa, and Southeast Asia have shown remarkable impact in shifting attitudes and behavior in conflict settings. See evaluation results form intended outcome media programming in Macedonia, Indonesia, Burundi, and Sierra Leone at <http://www.sfcg.org/sfcg/evaluations/evaluations.html>, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

⁴⁵ See: Internews: Afghan radio program responds to Danish cartoon controversy. April 2006. Available online at www.internews.org/news/2006/20060414_afghan.html, retrieved on November 6, 2006.

⁴⁶ See: The Islam Project, bridge-building in 10 communities between Muslims and non-Muslims. Active Voice Productions. www.activevoice.net, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

- ii. *Commission producers to create educational media content to be conveyed via innovative and popular entertainment formats* that reach broad sectors of society, such as reality challenges, game shows and popularity contests, where rewards require multi-cultural cooperation. Such a fund could seek adaptations of the already popular formats of Western fare which floods both the West and the Muslim world, but with constructive and educational themes or in unique ventures capable of attracting audiences across cultures simultaneously, aiming for wide cross-border broadcaster interest and advertisers. Examples of such media production are becoming more plentiful in recent years. These include innovative intercultural communication⁴⁷ with intentional educational messages in easily and eagerly-consumed form, such as newspaper special editions,⁴⁸ theatre companies, radio soap operas and comic books such as the Asia-Europe Comics Project of the Asia-Europe Foundation and Singapore Institute of Contemporary Arts.⁴⁹ Education and the media are the two most crucial public vehicles for creating and reinforcing social values and attitudes. Particularly with young people, such material can affect a change in how they form their initial social attitudes; that is, to broaden their horizons to a more inclusive, tolerant, and embracing view of the complex, pluralistic society in which they live. Radio soap operas have proved⁵⁰ enormously effective education and peace-building tools in countries such as Afghanistan, Sierra Leone and Burundi, and television shows in inter-culturally stressed countries such as Macedonia⁵¹ where citizens are starved for entertainment. If well-enough produced, such innovative material addressing the global community and especially Islamic-Western gaps can compete with and exceed the popularity of stereotype-laden conventional messaging. Additional attention can be drawn to such programming if broadcast is timed and located strategically around major events that garner attention across cultures, such as the World Cup or Olympic Games.
- iii. *Provide a “Risk Fund” to Temper the Market Forces that Allow Only Sensationalistic and Stereotyped Media and Cultural Materials to Be Exchanged Across Cultures.* The pressure to cover costs and turn profits from cultural exchanges and media productions makes it risky for theatres, museums, and other centers of cultural display and exhibit from taking anything but “sure bets” in cultural exchanges. Cultural products, including media productions that trade in the “proven formulas” of standard stereotypes, therefore dominate the cultural exchange market. Many presenters shy away

⁴⁷ <http://www.comminit.com/strategicthinking/pdsmakingwaves/sld-2593.html>, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

⁴⁸ See: Pluralism: Unity beyond diversity” special series, Jakarta Post 2006. Available online at: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/community/ina1.asp>, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

⁴⁹ See: Project Summary: Asia_Europe Comics Project. Available online at www.asef.org/project.asp?projcode=406&deptcode=4, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

⁵⁰ <http://www.comminit.com/evaluations/idmay15/sld-2299.html>, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

⁵¹ See: Nashe Malo, Final evaluation. Search for Common Ground, Washington 2001, available online at: http://pdf.dec.org/pdf_docs/Pdacd357.pdf, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

from presenting large-scale work by foreign companies because they fear significant losses at the box office. A risk or hedge fund that could guarantee presenters against dramatic losses might spur additional players to venture into this territory. Such a fund could be managed by an intermediary organization, or by a cultural institution with a prominent track record in this sphere. Such a fund could, perhaps, provide the means by which an important film produced in a Muslim country could survive in European or American theaters for the extra few weeks needed to gather support via word-of-mouth and become sustainable or even profitable. Similarly, it might allow less sensationalistic and more artistic products produced in the West to tour more extensively through predominantly Muslim countries. Such a fund could help increase exposure to positive and authentic and diverse portrayals of “the Other”.

- iv. *Support Media Productions that Counter Prevailing Stereotypes.* This is particularly important for young Muslims who are not accustomed to seeing role models to whom they can relate in the globalized, Western-produced media. For example, efforts are underway to produce video games featuring Muslim protagonists⁵² as well as cartoons featuring Muslim children⁵³, as opposed to Western non-Muslim characters dubbed into the local languages of countries with Muslim populations.

9) Support New Media Strategies and Efforts to Increase Media Literacy

48. The internet and the means of digital media production and dissemination provide an unprecedented opportunity for citizens across the globe to communicate with one another. While access to the internet varies widely by socio-economic class, internet access is growing exponentially in many developing countries, including in the Muslim world.⁵⁴ As with any powerful communication tool, the internet can and is used in ways that exacerbate divisions and reinforce stereotypes across cultures and in ways that bridge differences and promote cross-cultural understanding. The Alliance should take full advantage of and support funding and expansion of those “new media” strategies and initiatives that have proven successful in building cross-cultural understanding and in building media literacy among media consumers, particularly youth. The Alliance could do this by taking the following actions:

⁵² As reported in the May 13, 2006 meeting of the AoC at the Mission of Qatar to the UN, Al-Jazeera correspondent and former CNN news anchor Riz Khan has launched a video-game company with the sole purpose of producing games with Muslim protagonists as well as educational material about Muslim populations and countries integrated into the game – i.e. the lessons are integrated into the strategy of the game rather than in standard educational curriculum formats.

⁵³ Multiple production companies in the Middle East have begun developing cartoon series such as “Ben & Izzy” and “Yala Fanous” with the intent of featuring characters indigenous to the countries in which they would be broadcast to attract and build the self-esteem of Muslim youth viewers.

⁵⁴ See: Working Paper of the Arab Media Initiative of the World Economic Forum, presented May 3, 2005 in Cairo, Egypt.

- A. Promote, Feature, and Provide Links via the Alliance Website to Sites that Are Particularly Effective at Fostering Sustained Cross-Cultural Dialogue
While un-moderated chat rooms and blogs proliferate on the internet, web-based dialogue that connects people across cultures in deeper ways (i.e. in settings that are moderated, sustained over time, and/or institutionalized through youth centers or university settings) should be featured and expanded. Using the German Government-supported Qantara (“the bridge”) website⁵⁵ or the Egypt-based “Islam Online” website as examples, the Alliance could support a larger international portal to intercultural communication. The site format and content should seek socially conscious young adults based in predominantly Muslim countries and in the West. It could include straightforward explanation of cultural distinctions and similarities, reliable news reports, contemporary-issue and interactive forums for moderated discussion, links to leading cultural dialogue sites, chat-lines and supervised podcasting, and links to educational media materials, such as the EU-funded togetherTV online mini-documentaries.⁵⁶ Technology producers and developers could be approached to support the site.
- B. Support Initiatives that Place the Means of Media Production and Dissemination Directly in the Hands of Regular Citizens – Particularly Youth
Initiatives such as the Global Nomads Group (which provides digital cameras and training to young people in developing countries to produce their own documentaries), and Witness (which provides digital cameras and training to citizens to record and report on human rights abuses), provide the means by which voices of regular citizens can be heard, particularly via websites such as www.MySpace.com or Qantera noted above. Moreover, MTV World has expressed interest in airing short video segments of young people from around the world telling their own stories. Such openings should be pursued by the Alliance to provide direct communication between populations in the West and in the Muslim World and to provide platforms for young people in particular to express their views and opinions.
- C. Establish UN Chairs for Media and Society at Major Universities: Such chairs could be tasked with developing courses that foster critical media literacy among media consumers, furthering research into the impact of media on attitudes and behavior, contributing to the media monitoring mechanism noted above, researching and collecting best-practices on uses of new media, particularly the internet, to foster cross-cultural understanding and communication, and providing contact points for the convening of media networks and conferences.

⁵⁵ See: www.Qantara.de, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

⁵⁶ See: “togetherTV breaks the mould to boost coverage.....” Available online at: www.togetherTV.org, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

Annex I: The Danish Cartoon Controversy **And the Role of Political & Cultural Leadership**

The Danish cartoons incident of 2005- 2006 revealed many dimensions⁵⁷ of Islam-West misunderstanding but at its core demonstrated journalistic insensitivity and popular ignorance and commercial and political exploitation, especially in Europe and the Middle East.

The Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten's caricatures equating the Prophet Mohammed with terrorism, as a defense of free speech where no secular freedom was at stake, was unjustifiably provocative, not principled. Compounding media and public ignorance of the depth of disrespect to Muslims was Danish political leaders' dismissal of dialogue with offended Muslim leaders, which played to xenophobic European sentiments and confronted Muslims with an image of Denmark as officially Islamophobic.

Reprinting of the cartoons by other European media (none in the UK, very few in North America) was ill-considered solidarity for media freedoms in some cases, and a craven bow to circulation-boosting in others. Further, the intemperate language of some Muslims protesting in London made headlines which reinforced stereotypes. Some Danish Muslim leaders striving for respect resorted to Middle-East campaigning which triggered emotional retaliation to reported Western extremism, abetted by their circulation of additional, more offensive cartoons. Arab media coverage focused on xenophobic aspects of Denmark and mis-portrayed Muslims as oppressed there. Too few Muslim and Arab leaders effectively balanced dissent in defense of their faith with constraint of the violent responses, some politically engineered, which resulted in the burning of some foreign embassies and further inflamed western stereotypical reporting of Arabs and Islamic culture.

Tolerance, dialogue and pluralism took a beating on all sides.

⁵⁷ See: Powers, Shaun&Arsenault, Amelia: The Danish Cartoon Crisis: USCC Center on Public Diplomacy, USC Annenberg School of Communications, April 5, 2006.
Also see: Nassief, Hawazen: Time to Heal, Khaleej Times, April 10, 2006.
Also see: Nawar, Ibrahim: Media Freedom and Dialogue, Arab Press Freedom Watch, February 2006. Available at: www.apfh.org/print.asp?fname=articles/english\2006\02\are1029.htm, retrieved on November 5, 2006.
Also see: Shapiro, John: Muslims and the West: A culture war? February 14, 2006. Available online at: http://cmcu.georgetown.edu/publications/Muslims_And_The_West_A_Culture_War.pdf, retrieved on November 5, 2006.
Also see: Nimah, Hasan Abu: Realizing the danger and reconsidering. Washington Report Middle East Affairs. Available at: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/community/ina1.asp>, retrieved on November 5, 2006.
Also see: Villate-Compton, Pascale: Media Freedom and dialogue between cultures, Arab Press Freedom watch, 2006. Available online at <http://www.apfw.org/data/annualconference/2006/english/papers/PascaleVillateCompton.pdf>, retrieved on November 5, 2006.
Also see: Armstrong, Karen: We can defuse this tension...., The Guardian, March 11, 2006.

The Danish cartoons crisis confirms the need for responses to the media's influence which respect free speech and cultural values and facilitate dialogue and understanding where the two principles intersect.

The over-riding requirement is political and cultural leadership that recognizes the media today is the first platform or pulpit from which to lead. Policy-makers of good will can set the agenda for the media, not encroaching on media freedom but establishing the tone on an issue.⁵⁸ As Ismail Serageldin, director-general of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, suggests, what is needed is not legislation but "enhanced social consciousness that fixes the norms of acceptable behaviour.... If the overwhelming majority of Western society including its political leaders had condemned the cartoons, without necessarily restricting the right of the newspaper to publish them, it would have gone a long way towards healing past wounds and to fostering the trust needed to diffuse the issue."⁵⁹

It was precisely this kind of widely reported leadership that defused tension over the cartoons incident in Indonesia. President Yudhoyono came out early condemning the cartoons publication but highlighted Danish expressions of regret. He was supported by an array of prominent religious leaders in Indonesia who also condemned the cartoons but with the message that the issue was "not really about the West versus Islam but about reckless journalism." There was no widespread violence in Indonesia, the world's most populous Muslim country, in reaction to the cartoons.⁶⁰

Similarly, following the bombing attacks in London in 2005 incidents of hate-motivated crime began to rise against members of the Muslim community there. "This is where political leadership came in: the UK government, police, community leaders and Muslim organizations took a strong stance in condemning such attacks as the acts of misguided individuals. And they strongly opposed any acts of retaliation against the wider Muslim community. As a result the level of incidents was soon moving back towards previous levels.... On the whole the media followed the lead of the politicians and reported in a balanced and responsible way," according to Bette Winkler, Director of the European Union's Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia.⁶¹

⁵⁸ See: Winkler, Beate: Remarks: How could policy makers ensure more informed. European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia. Vienna, April 19, 2006. Available online at www.eumc.eu.int, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

⁵⁹ Ismail Serageldin, Director-General of the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Egypt. April 20-26 2006. Available at: weekly.ahram.org.eg/2006/791/op2.htm, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

⁶⁰ Bayuni, Endy; Editor, Jakarta Post. Interview by Mark Taylor, April 28, 2006.

⁶¹ http://eumc.eu.int/eumc/index.php?fuseaction=content.dsp_cat_content&catid=2, retrieved on November 5, 2006.

Annex II: Cultural & Artistic Exchanges Between the West and Predominantly Muslim Countries⁶²

Working Paper: May 13 Meeting of the UN Alliance of Civilizations

I. Introduction

This paper outlines key issues involved in supporting cultural exchange between the West – the United States and Europe – and predominantly Muslim countries. It reviews the current context and some of the overarching considerations involved in promoting effective exchange. It also suggests strategies that could improve the prospects for exchange. This paper is not a definitive treatise on the broad and complex topic of international cultural exchange, but rather a briefing paper that identifies some of the most pressing issues and prominent opportunities in this vast realm and that outlines some strategic choices for the AoC to make as it considers whether and what to recommend in the field of cultural exchanges. It also highlights some of the most pressing issues and prominent opportunities, and raises questions for further discussion. In this briefing, the term “cultural exchange” is used to cover an array of activities that broadly involve the movement of artists, arts professionals, and exhibits between Europe and/or the US and the Muslim world.⁶³

II. Context

A. Globalization & Pop Culture

Rapid advances in technology over the past twenty years have facilitated interactions of people and information across geographical and cultural borders at a pace never before imagined. Immigrants to Europe and the United States comprise a growing portion of the populations in those regions, their customs and cultures mixing with the hybrid American and European cultures to create results unique from that found in either their country of origin or their newly adopted home-countries. At the same time, the global marketplace has made cultural commodities available for purchase all over the world, a state of affairs that has been promoted by and benefited the commercial Western cultural industries. As a result, people have become mixed, interconnected and interdependent at the same time as they have been dispersed from their places and cultures of origin.

In the current system, the exchange of cultural goods and services is dominated by the marketplace, and the benefits and drawbacks of living in the “global village” do not fall equally on all participants. In a market-based system of cultural exchange, the richest

⁶² This paper was commissioned and prepared by the AoC Secretariat, with primary contributions from AEA Consulting. The sections of the paper focused on the US are taken from a review contracted to AEA Consulting by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation as part of its program planning for future work in the area of international cultural exchange. The sections concerning Europe were commissioned by the Alliance of Civilizations to AEA Consulting in preparation for its meeting on Youth and Media held May 13, 2006 at the Mission of Qatar to the UN.

⁶³ The term “Muslim world” is used cautiously, with the understanding that there are at least 60 countries with predominantly Muslim populations, comprising between 1.2 and 1.5 billion people. Nothing so vast could be one “world,” and these nations and their cultures are infinitely varied. Equally, terms such as “Europe” and “the West” are used for the sake of convenience and with the knowledge that they contain a wide range of diverse cultures and experiences, including those of Muslim Europeans and Americans.

countries tend to be the largest beneficiaries while the poorest countries are often the biggest losers. In addition, a market-driven system of cultural exchange limits the dispersion of cultural forms to those that are profitable to the private sector, not necessarily those that are representative of the best or most important aspects of the culture that is they are supposed to represent.

As an example, the content of American pop cultural exports often reinforces the negative images that others hold of American society as superficial, ignorant, sex-obsessed, and greedy. Moreover, the way in which other cultures and minority groups are portrayed in those American pop culture forms that are most popular internationally (i.e. film, television, “gangster rap”, etc.) is no more flattering. Such cultural flows may do more to exacerbate cross-cultural differences and polarization than they do to ameliorate them. Those who are most disturbed by this trend however are often the same people who sustain this market by voraciously consuming popular U.S. films, television, music, and hip-hop culture, among other things.

B. State of Support for Exchanges

1. United States

In the United States, federal funding for international cultural exchanges was originally part of a Cold War program to publicize the benefits of democracy by showcasing the diverse artistic products generated by a free society. Funneled through the US Information Agency (USIA), funding has supported mostly artists from the United States traveling abroad, which has resulted in a “cultural trade imbalance.” Since the 1980s private entities have replaced the declining sources of federal funding, and the USIA programs have been substantially cut and absorbed into the Department of State in 1999. However, even as private funding in this field has risen, international artistic exchanges remain hugely under-resourced, and particularly those between the US and the Muslim world and, specifically, the Middle East. Only 6.5% of total foundation funding is allocated to international artistic exchanges and the geographical region with which the fewest exchanges were funded in the U.S. was the Middle East at only 6% of total international cultural exchange grants (Europe was the highest at 30%).⁶⁴

In the US, funding for production and presentation of work has dominated international arts grant-making, while support for extended artists’ residencies, contextualization of work, and touring has been limited.⁶⁵ These patterns are true for both U.S. artists going abroad and foreign artists coming to the U.S. As a result, much international work, once it gets to the United States, fails to travel beyond one or two venues, thus missing a much larger potential audience, and U.S. artists going overseas face obstacles in presenting their work in multiple venues and/or in multiple countries.

⁶⁴ Renz, Loren et. al. International Grantmaking III. The Foundation Center. 2004.

⁶⁵ DeNatale, Douglas et. al. Developing an Effective System for the Commissioning and Touring of International Work. New England Foundation for the Arts.

2. Europe

The case of Europe is more difficult to summarize for obvious reasons. The member states of the European Union each pursue different policies and practices regarding international exchanges, which are further affected by a wide variety of differences between them, including differences in the immigrant communities that provide linkages and support of varying degrees at the private sector level for cultural exchanges with their countries of origin or ancestry. Some European countries invest more extensively than the U.S. in information networks, booking conferences, cultural markets and other mechanisms that encourage international cultural exchange. Germany, France, the U.K. and the Netherlands provide support for such mechanisms, advanced, in part, by quasi-diplomatic cultural bureaus such as the Goethe Institute, the Alliance Francaise, and the British Council, though it should be noted that, as was the case with the old USIA system, their primary missions are to propagate their respective national cultures abroad, not to advance reciprocal learning and exchange, though all of them do to varying degrees through their activities.

At the regional level, while resolutions have been passed in the European Union for European cultural initiatives since the 1970s, only in 1991 did the EU officially begin to deal with culture under the Maastricht treaty; however this focused on intra-European exchanges and preservation of cultural heritage. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership initiated in 1995 marked an opening in political, economic and social relations between the member states of the European Union and partners of the Southern Mediterranean, with one of the three main objectives of the partnership pertaining to fostering intercultural understanding and exchanges. The Social, Cultural, and Human Chapter of the Barcelona Declaration called, in part, for “rapprochement between peoples through a social, cultural and human partnership aimed at encouraging understanding between cultures and exchanges between civil societies”.⁶⁶ The establishment of the Euro-Med Anna Lindh Foundation in Egypt is perhaps the primary Institutional manifestation of this regional European policy of promoting cross-cultural exchanges, though it is too new for its impact and track record to be assessed.

Europe does encounter a similar problem to the US, only more so because of its make-up of member states. The vast majority of the initiatives within its borders are still organized at the bi-lateral and not regional level so that few cross-cultural initiatives allow artistic and cultural tours that beyond one country in Europe or vice versa in predominantly Muslim regions.

Though there is no centralized body at the national policy level in the US dedicated to supporting international cultural exchanges, and only a fairly nascent regional approach to this issue taking shape in Europe (with individual member states exhibiting a wide variety of levels of commitment to cultural exchanges with the Muslim World), opportunities are emerging for broad-based cultural exchanges that could be seized. The European Commission has designated 2008 as the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, presenting a context through which exchanges can be fostered. Among the objectives of the Year is to “underline the contribution of different cultures to our heritage and lifestyles; raising

⁶⁶ Mediterranean partner countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia, and Turkey.

awareness of European citizens and all people living in the EU, in particular young people, on the importance of exploring the means to be implemented to develop, through intercultural dialogue, an active European citizenship, with an open attitude to the world, respecting cultural diversity and based on common values in the European Union.”

The events to be supported during the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue provide a natural venue for the contributions of European Muslim artists, as well as an opportunity for the historical cultural contributions of the Muslim world to Europe to be recognized and celebrated.

3. Predominantly Muslim Countries

It is even more difficult to generalize across Muslim countries than it is across Europe given the geographic and cultural breadth encompassed by “the Muslim World”. Nonetheless, it is the case that in many predominantly Muslim countries, including most of the countries of the Middle East, the public infrastructures for cultural exchange are weak or nonexistent and there are very few private substitutes outside of individual philanthropists, making it very difficult for foundations and cultural organizations in the U.S. and Europe to identify reliable on-the-ground partners for international work. Those U.S. foundations that are working in Muslim countries, such as the Ford Foundation and Christensen Fund, work in concert with local experts who are knowledgeable about the region’s arts and culture. Finding such people and developing effective working relationships is a task which itself requires substantial knowledge, time and resources. These logistical problems are compounded by the great variety in art forms, languages, media, and audiences worldwide. It is difficult for arts organizations to accommodate, produce and publicize art forms that are entirely unfamiliar and which often require alternative venues and presentation formats, and extensive and nuanced audience education. These challenges have resulted in a situation in which only a relatively small group of arts organizations, donors, and academic Institutions have had the expertise, time and initiative to pursue the research and build the base necessary to support long-term international exchanges.

Moreover, in those cases where linkages have been established (by, for example, the US foundations or European cultural Institutes mentioned above), access to these networks often requires professional contacts or introductions, available primarily for those artists and arts groups that already have extensive international experience and exposure. Many artists have difficulty finding out about opportunities for international exchange and networking and making the most of the possibilities that do exist.

In addition, the attitude of some governments and the more rigidly conservative segments of populations in some predominantly Muslim countries is discouraging, both to cultural imports from the West, and to many cultural expressions from within their own societies. Extremist elements within many Muslim societies, including some immigrant Muslim communities in the West, perceive the influx of Western culture as threatening to Islamic values. The most conservative Muslim societies often view artistic expression as a subversive display of individualism that is tantamount to political (and by extension religious) rebellion. Artists in these societies have limited options: they can avoid publicity and attention altogether or they can conform to the parameters of expression set by their

governments or the most vocally conservative in their communities, inevitably constricting their own artistic voice in the process.

In light of these deficiencies in the support and propagation of one's own cultural forms from within the Muslim world, many Western centers of cultural exchange find it difficult to engage a broad diversity of Muslim cultural and artistic voices. The Goethe Institute for example has expressed the perspective that Muslim countries must take responsibility for celebrating, translating and disseminating their own culture but that it is a willing partner in this effort. The fact that such a statement is prompted in the first place indicates the problems that abound in many Muslim countries when it comes to cultural and artistic expression and exchanges.

III. Challenges and Obstacles

The lack of information, definitional terms, the scarcity of effective intermediary organizations, language barriers, and political constraints present significant logistical challenges to those seeking to expand and cultural exchange between the West and the Muslim world.

A. Lack of Information - There is no centralized source for information or resources for international cultural exchange, neither between the US or Europe and the Muslim World, nor between the West and the Muslim World more generally, let alone at the global level across all cultures and regions. A brief review of sources on European cultural initiatives indicates that there are some exceptional and quite accessible information sources and databases on cultural exchanges and events, funding sources, leading participating Institutions, etc, but the vast majority of them are dedicated to intra-European cultural initiatives.

Although the development of an official agency for international cultural exchange in the US, or a regional one in Europe, is unlikely (and maybe even undesirable), mechanisms to encourage artists and cultural organizations to enter the international sphere, guide their work, and facilitate exchange activities must be developed if international cultural exchange in the is to fulfill its potential. There is no shortage of interested performers, musicians, and artists seeking to engage internationally and across cultures, but very few – and then mostly the elites - know how to go about doing so. As a result, international cultural exchange initiated from the U.S. and Europe take place mostly on an ad hoc basis and largely through the initiative of the same privileged cadre of individual arts organizations and artists.

B. Definitional Terms - Labeling an artwork “Islamic Art” because its creator hails from a predominantly Muslim country is as misguided as labeling an artwork “Christian Art” because its creator hails from a predominantly Christian country. In the past, when the majority of art was made in a context of courtly patronage or religious decoration the relationship of spiritual themes to aesthetics was direct. Contemporary Islamic art, however, is more difficult to define: is the art really created by artists who wish to assert their Islamic/Muslim identities or is it simply contemporary art from Islamic states? Like artists of other denominations -- Jews, Buddhists and Christians – many Muslim artists do not wish to be seen within a religious framework, or at least not solely or primarily through that lens.

Because of the complexity of artistic distribution in Islamic countries and the lack of knowledge about Islamic cultural traditions in the U.S. and Europe, any attempt to present the rich diversity of Islam through art and culture must encompass at least two approaches – enriching Western understanding of the historical context of various artistic expressions and recognizing contemporary and diverse artistic voices that are informed by this Islamic legacy. The Alliance of Civilizations may want to favor exchanges that seek to improve “Islamic-Western” relations, but particularly in the tense atmosphere of today, such approaches need to be advanced with extra care and planning to avoid the use of language and categories that exacerbate the very stereotypes they seek to challenge.

B. Intermediaries – Most European countries maintain cultural attaches in their embassies in Muslim countries and vice versa. These organizations offer one entry point for cultural exchange. Entities noted above such as the British Council, Alliance Francaise and Goethe Institute are energetic and valuable agents in promoting international cultural partnerships. However, counterparts in the Muslim world are scarce, making it difficult for European cultural groups to identify on-the-ground partners for international work. This may be one of the reasons why most of the efforts to-date have been bi-lateral programs, rarely involving sustained exchanges or opportunities for artists or cultural material to travel to multiple venues and countries within Europe or, vice versa, in the Middle East.⁶⁷

C. Language, Politics, Money – Even when other logistical challenges are overcome, language is a significant barrier. Presenting artists in proper cultural context when they do not speak or understand the native language is difficult. Getting the presentation format right and educating the audience effectively is an important, and sometimes costly consideration. Compounding these costs are political barriers that some Western countries have erected in the wake of terrorist activity, most notably the United States following the passing into law of the Patriot Act, restricting travel by foreign artists to and within the borders of Western countries. The effects of these new policies include diplomatic problems (artists denied entry), administrative hassles (an increase in bureaucratic paperwork), and increased costs (for expediting visas and other related expenses). The lack of financial support noted above is also a constraint.

D. Length of Engagements – In order to promote deeper cultural understanding, one-time exchanges across borders are not sufficient. They can even be problematic if they are (or are perceived to be) a form of Western neocolonialism or cultural imperialism in which “exotic” foreign cultures are brought, for example, to the U.S. and exploited as novelty items. Conferences have long been the dominant mechanism for showcasing and booking international work in the U.S., but this format may not suit many cultural forms, and the U.S. booking system does little to promote long-term relationships. Meaningful cultural exchange necessitates a more “holistic” and creative approach to international exchange paradigms, and requires research, depth of knowledge and longer-term investments in the global cultural ecology.⁶⁸ Given the heightened tensions in relations between predominantly

⁶⁷ It should be noted here that there are numerous informal but disconnected networks for cultural exchange in the U.S. and Europe, many of them flowing through immigrant communities that offer preliminary material for building an infrastructure for supporting international cultural exchange.

⁶⁸ Yoshitomi, Gerald et. al. International Presenting in the United States: A Field Assessment Report 1995.

Muslim societies and many Western nations, these extra-cost items, such as providing educational and outreach supplements to artistic exhibits and exchanges, are particularly important.

E. Risk-Averse Arts Environments – Nonprofit arts organizations in the U.S. are being pressed to expand their scope, to serve more diverse audiences and the changing demographics of their communities. However, the costs involved in pursuing international work (getting abroad to scout possibilities, bringing artists and their materials from overseas, developing appropriate marketing and interpretive or contextualization materials, etc.) can be prohibitive, and the programs may be risky in terms of whether they generate sufficient revenue to cover costs. It is often difficult for cultural organizations to make the argument for this programming to their boards unless it is central to their mission. Lack of adequate training and preparation to conduct such work are other impeding factors as most artists and arts administrators learn about how to conduct exchanges through first-hand experience. To improve the capacity to undertake effective cultural exchange activities, artists and arts administrators need education about the various logistical dimensions of effective partnership as well as the cultural and anthropological issues that are likely to influence their experience.

F. Reciprocity – It goes without saying that the term exchanges implies a reciprocal two-way act. However, government-funded initiatives are rarely reciprocal in spirit even if they are technically. Artists can be sent to a country in order to teach others, and then receive visitors from that country in order to educate them further. This is rarely how exchanges are framed, but it can be how they are perceived, particularly when organized and funded by government offices that are closely tied to the foreign policy bureaus of their administrations. This is particularly the case with regard to US efforts as the government-funded side of cross-cultural exchanges is largely managed by the Public Diplomacy Department of the U.S. State Department, the mandate of which is to advance US policy abroad at a time when that policy is particularly unpopular in the Muslim World. It is important in this atmosphere for private supporters of cultural exchange to increase their commitments to supporting two-way exchange and to make their commitment to reciprocity more visible to artists, cultural groups and possible partners, including potential public and private funding sources in other countries.

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

In spite of its inherent challenges and the difficulties facing those interested in promoting cultural exchange between the West and the Muslim world, the need for increased support of this work has rarely been greater. In a global society splintered by parochial interests, art has an important role to play in mediating the images and information that are communicated across national and cultural boundaries. Art is not the panacea for global understanding, but it is one means by which to foster dialogue and understanding between individuals, communities, religions and nation-states. International travel and interactions with other artists and audiences stimulate artists' imaginations and the range of ideas and references from which they can draw. It also connects immigrant artists and ethnic communities with their cultural history, making them less isolated and disaffected and increasing the flow of new ideas across borders. The variety of art-making and cultural

expression originating in both Western and Muslim societies offer a window into the richness and diversity of both worlds, which can help to dispel the stereotypes and intolerance that breeds extremism.

A. Goals

Broadly speaking, effective and responsible international cultural exchange involves the following elements, and the Alliance should ensure that any recommendations it advances call for or imply these points:

- Expanding artists' exposure to and understanding of the art and aesthetics of other countries;
- Encouraging arts Institutions to function in a global context, and present their audiences with artists and artworks that reflect their own nation's cultural diversity, particularly in Western countries where that diversity is growing from the continued arrival and integration of immigrants;
- Nurturing audiences' understanding of the artists and artworks of other cultures by engaging them in the creation, presentation and interpretation of diverse work;
- Challenging stereotypes based on religion, culture, gender, race, class, nationality and ethnicity, and simplistic notions of monolithic mutually exclusive cultures or civilizations;
- Promoting scholarship about and contextualization of artwork;
- Attempting, where possible, to complement exhibits and performances with outreach and education; and
- Lowering the barriers to international cultural exchange.

B. Strategies

Some strategies that would promote and expand meaningful cultural exchange include networks and information exchange, media, and funding.

1. Networks and Information Exchange

a. Build an International Presenting Network

Especially in times of fiscal constraint, networks help sustain and expand lines of work. A network of presenting organizations dedicated to deepening and improving international exchange could encourage risk-taking, multi-site tours by foreign artists, and the development of presenting skills among artists and art professionals. Something like the National Performance Network⁶⁹, but focused exclusively on international work and inclusive of both large Institutions and community-based organizations, could expand the communities in which foreign artists perform, improve the contextualization and interpretation of work, and forge partnerships between cultural communities in the West with their counterparts in predominantly Muslim countries. Such a network might also expand the larger field's capacity to

⁶⁹ National Performance Network (NPN) facilitates tours by dance and theater companies in the U.S.

undertake international work by sponsoring training sessions, issuing publications and promoting partnerships outside the network.

b. Develop an Online Information Clearinghouse

Knowledge about international exchange – effective techniques, key players, financial resources, etc. – is widely dispersed and inadequately accessed, increasing the cost of entry into this field and ensuring widespread duplication of effort. An initiative or initiatives to address this gap through web-based strategies could have important pay-offs over the long term. Several models of such information databases can be found via the European Community “Europa” and related sites that serve intra-European artistic exchanges and networks.

c. Seek Partnerships Between Causes and Artistic and Cultural Exchanges

International grant-making doubled in value between 1998 and 2002, and commitments to international work are increasing among U.S.- and Europe-based foundations and corporations. While arts-focused grant-making accounts for only 6% of the total, investments in other fields consume much larger portions of the international grant dollar. There may be opportunities to expand resources for artists and arts organizations by creating joint ventures with international funders interested in health, environment, education, and the MDGs for example, enabling artists and cultural organizations to bring their talents and creativity to bear on these issues. The World Bank’s Culture and Sustainable Development work may open possibilities in this regard.

d. Strengthen Intra-Muslim Networks

There is a desperate need to identify cultural experts in the Muslim world and for the Muslim world to take a proactive role in celebrating and communicating its own cultures. The lack of support for culture within many Muslim countries makes it difficult to support international exchange in the way it is normally conceived. Until this primary obstacle is addressed, exchanges will always have a feeling of being run by the Western half of the exchange. Means of strengthening these networks and infrastructures might include regular strategy meetings of arts professionals, Muslim philanthropists (including ex-patriate Muslim philanthropists now living outside their countries of origin), and interested business leaders from the Muslim world to develop approaches to Ministry of Culture officials and other appropriate bodies to loosen the barriers and develop greater incentives for artistic development and exchange opportunities emanating from the Muslim World; conferring awards and other honorifics on young artists and cultural icons; liaising with successful Muslim immigrant communities in the West to develop avenues for regular exchange, etc.⁷⁰

e. Expand “Islamic Art” Beyond the Middle East

⁷⁰ The Aga Khan Foundation already works in some of these areas and would be a key organization with which to liaise from the start.

When organizing cultural and artistic performances in the West along the theme of “Art from the Islamic World” every effort should be made to integrate some elements from the 85% of the global Muslim population that is non-Arab – i.e. South and Southeast Asia, Africa, the Balkans, etc. in order to challenge the stereotype of Islamic Art implying Art from the Arab World.

f. Support and Engage Existing and Planned Events and Institutions

The development of increased avenues for artistic and cultural exchange between predominantly Muslim countries and Europe via the Anna Lindh Foundation and the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the annual Fes World Music Festival and Colloquium in Fes, Morocco, etc. The Alliance should liaise with the organizers and leaders of these events and organizations to maximize the educational outreach that can accompany their existing and planned cultural exchange efforts and, where helpful, to increase the profile and even the political impact that the events have on the way Muslim immigrant or minority communities are viewed in European and American societies and how European and American cultures are viewed in predominantly Muslim countries.

2. Program Funding

a. Establish a Risk Fund

Many presenters shy away from presenting large-scale work by foreign companies because they fear significant losses at the box office. Thus many outstanding international programs only visit one venue in the U.S., then go on to perform in other international cities. A risk or hedge fund that could guarantee presenters against dramatic losses might spur additional players to venture into this territory. Such a fund could be managed by an intermediary organization, or by a cultural Institution with a prominent track record in this sphere. Such a fund could, perhaps, provide the means by which an important film produced in a Muslim country could survive in American theaters for the extra few weeks needed to gather support via word-of-mouth and become sustainable or even profitable.

b. Develop a Pool of Donors to Pool Resources and Share Risk

To address the hesitancy of some donors to fund exchanges in a post-9/11 world, the Alliance could convene a regular network of donors interested in such efforts to try to establish mechanisms of minimizing costs and sharing risks in order to free up funds for cultural and artistic exchanges with the Muslim world.

c. Recognize and Support Lead Institutions

Use the auspices of the Alliance to award and boost the profile of the cultural, community and educational Institutions in Europe and Muslim countries that are committed to international exchange, enabling them to conduct programs and share best practices with others.

3. Policy

a. *Convene a Regular Policy Forum*

Regular, inclusive and focused discussions between donors, policy makers, and practitioners in the cultural exchange fields is required in the US in order to generate recommendations or action steps to address the issues that impede international cultural exchange could be formulated. There are numerous policy issues to be addressed, but some of the most pressing include immigration policy and visa regulations, definitions of art and culture employed by major policy bodies (donors, UNESCO, etc), and the relationship of U.S. foreign policy to cultural diplomacy. This is parallel to the recommendation for regular strategy meetings in the Muslim world to open the space for cultural expression and exchanges.

b. *Provide Research for Advocacy Purposes*

The federal government has curtailed its support for international cultural exchange, and private sector support is not increasing sufficiently as a percentage of the whole. Stronger case-making, based on qualitative and quantitative information regarding the impacts of international cultural exchange is essential. Leading presenters, arts service organizations, academic centers or others might be enlisted in the development of stronger arguments for investment in this area.⁷¹

⁷¹ COLEAD and the cultural alliance built during the “culture wars” of the 1980s may serve as models.