

Speech

Of Her Highness

Sheikha Mozah bint Nasser Al Missned

In the Opening Session

Of the Third Universal Forum

For the Alliance of Civilizations

Rio de Janeiro

May 28th, 2010

In the Name of God the Merciful the Compassionate

Excellencies

Mr. Lula da Silva, President of the Republic of Brazil,,,

Mr. Ban Ki-moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations,,,

Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Prime Minister of the Republic of Turkey,,,

Mr. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, Prime Minister of the Spanish Government,,,
Mr. Jorge Sampaio, High Representative of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)
and former President of Portugal

Ladies and Gentlemen,,,

I am proud to be with you at the opening of the third forum for the Alliance of Civilizations in Rio de Janeiro.

I believe that today we are all required to gather our efforts in order to ensure that this forum constitutes a turning point in the path of the Alliance of Civilizations.

Five years after the Mallorca meeting, there is no doubt that we have gained a wealth of experience which have required us to examine the issues and to look forward rather than backwards.

Our main objective needs to be to ensure that the contribution of this alliance is put to valuable use in achieving the millennium objectives within the timeline of 2015 which we have set.

Over the past five years, our discussions were fruitful and beneficial, which allowed us to bring our visions closer; we tried as much as possible to build a common ground and to open constructive channels of dialogue pertaining to the issues which caused most concern.

I personally believe that this previous phase of dialogue was extremely necessary because it helped us to enhance our conviction that the objective of the Alliance of Civilizations was not and will never be to bridge the gap between the West and Islam nor to dispel the causes of tension between them. This phase as well, with all the fruitful dialogues it has known directed the course of our minds towards the real objective consisting of addressing global issues threatening the civilizations' unity armed with the desire to develop a real understanding of our contemporary world which enhanced our conviction in the need to refuse preconceived judgments and ideas.

These dialogues have shown that human beings, regardless of any differences or cultural origins, together face universal and global issues; those of combating poverty and ignorance, and eliminating all aspects of injustice, isolation and marginalization.

This is how we in Qatar view the Alliance of Civilizations. This is our conviction which is based on recognizing the absolute right of any human being as a central player in working towards the changes to ensure sustainable human development.

Based on this principle, we believe that time has come to build upon what we have achieved over the past five years.

We must adopt a pragmatic approach which allows to transform the ideas into realistic, executable and viable programs, because "Reflection and Action are necessary for change and progress" as the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire once believed.

Ladies and Gentlemen,,,

In a few moments, we will be discussing an extremely important subject pertaining to the issue of cultural diversity as a path towards peace.

This subject is not new per se, as the efforts undertaken by the international community after World War II were based on empowering all human communities by enabling them to enjoy the right to practice their sovereignty in its most significant meaning.

Raising the subject of cultural diversity again under the umbrella of the Alliance of Civilizations stresses that there still exists uncertainties relating to the right for difference and for diversity.

Therefore, I believe in the need to work on promoting and strengthening the role of major regional groups to enable them to play an active role in ensuring peace and security.

First, I firmly believe that the Arab community with its human, natural and strategic potential can, along with other major groups from Asia and Latin America and others form a driving force to enhance the values of the Alliance of Civilizations. Such a step falls within the principles of the Alliance. As Freire once believed: "Attempting to liberate the oppressed without their reflective participation in the act of liberation is to treat them as objects that must be saved from a burning building."

Second, you will agree with me that in order for the culture of peace to be more than just a symbol and perhaps an illusion, we must build trust and repel the doubts by eradicating the causes of tension and injustice.

As a citizen who takes pride in her Arab identity, rich civilization and cultural heritage, I, like hundreds of millions of my people, cannot accept the suffering of our brothers under siege in Gaza and the West Bank, whose values and cultural heritage in Jerusalem are threatened.

Are we really aware, as an international community of what Jerusalem represents not only to Arabs and to Muslims, but to the followers of all monotheistic religions and to humanity in its entirety?

Do we realize the symbolism represented by the discriminatory separation barriers which contradict the values of righteousness, justice and equality we are gathered today to uphold?

Do we truly comprehend the significance of the systematic cultural blackout targeting a people's youth by depriving them of their legitimate right to education through the prohibition of construction materials and the essential learning tools. What can we expect from these youth?

We stress the cultural diversity we seek and hope for is not an exclusive right and does not allow anyone to impose a given situation and to forge history.

That is why there are two choices we could make:

we could either follow the path of righteousness and trust and build upon it, which gives us the right to talk about cultural diversity as a road towards peace, or the path of darkness, doubt and skepticism can continue to rule, and we all know where that leads.

Third, we have to benefit from the successful experiences in establishing the concept of cultural diversity, and it is my view that Latin America, where we are delighted to meet, has formed a fertile ground for the fruitful dialogue and complementarity of cultures.

We as Arabs take pride in the role led by the first Arab intellectuals who chose the North and South of the American continent to be their second home.

How can we forget Gibran, Ilya and Naimy and their contributions in the development of the Arab mind?

These innovators and who followed their steps to this date, have contributed in forging close relationships with their new societies while at the same time never denying where they came from.

They were rightly considered to be permanent ambassadors for two cultures and civilizations, transcending capably geo-political barriers, and have become a living symbol for a practical and realistic alliance which we all seek today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,,,

Humanity is facing major issues which it needs to confront with will and determination.

These issues pertain to combating illiteracy, enhancing the right to quality education and cultural diversity, ensuring the equal benefit from the technological progress and scientific research, combating diseases and containing the environmental challenges threatening food security and environmental security, yes ladies and gentlemen, environmental security.

The fact is that we are facing a crisis in a globalization based on profit, not people. In fact, many societies, especially those in developing countries, are often viewed as subjects of laboratory experiments, rather than equal human beings with the right to environmental security.

For example, the use of white phosphorus, cluster bombs and depleted uranium have caused irreversible damage to the Arab region in particular.

Since the two Gulf wars scientists have been studying the long term effects of the use of depleted uranium on the environment and human population.

And the region has witnessed a rise in the number of chronic and untreatable diseases since the first gulf war which has been connected to adverse effects on the environment in addition to birth defects.

After the first Gulf War alone, for example, birth defects increased in Iraq from 11 per 100,000 in 1989 to 116 per 100,000 in 2001 and cancers in southern Iraq increased from 34 people in 1988 to 603 in 2001.

Further medical and environmental studies are just beginning to uncover the effects of using these weapons on the entire environmental ecosystem of the region and even the ecosystems of the Mediterranean and Europe.

How can the Alliance of Civilizations contribute in solving these important and urgent issues?

The answer to this main question will give this alliance a value and significance which will put it on the right track.

I take this opportunity to thank Mr. Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary-General of the United Nations with regard to forming a high level group pertaining to the millennium objectives. This initiative must receive from all of us the needed support, and therefore we must make sure we employ it rightfully and that we work on building bridges of collaboration and partnership in order to enhance the Alliance of civilizations vision.

That is how I view the soul of Rio de Janeiro today and I look forward for the soul of Doha 2011, to be.

I thank you all and wish our forum the success.