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ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Ministerial Meeting

Third Forum of the Alliance

Rio de Janeiro,

28 May 2010

Mr. Ali Abdussalam Treky, President of the General Assembly

Mr. Celso Amorim, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Brazil

Mr. Miguel Moratinos, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain

Mr. Ahmed Davutoglu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey

Ministers

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear members of the Group of Friends

- First of all, I would like to renew my heartfelt thanks to Minister Celso Amorim for the most generous hospitality extended to us all by his government and for the outstanding organization of this Forum.

- Secondly, I would like to greet the new members of the Group of Friends and warmly welcome you on board.

- I hope that we will all live up to our mutual expectations and that this growing community is becoming stronger and better able to face the pressures of living together with people of different cultures and different beliefs from one's own at a time when we are also facing intense economic and social challenges and a number of international tensions and conflicts.

Excellencies,

- In the Annotated Agenda that I prepared for this meeting, I shared with you my greatest concerns regarding the Alliance.

- So here I will only highlight three points regarding the most compelling challenges ahead.

- Firstly, the need to develop a much closer cooperation with all the constituencies of the Alliance in order to increasingly embed the Alliance at local level.

- At a time when the global crisis and the expanding diversity of our societies are generating growing fear of the “other”, intolerance, discrimination and xenophobic attitudes, there is an urgent need to work together to rebuild trust among people of different cultures and faiths. This should be our highest priority.

- A second challenge ahead that I want to stress regards the need to be clear about the aims to be achieved because efforts to foster cooperation across cultures can easily fall into at least two traps.

- On the one hand, efforts may foster such innocuous, basic and apolitical agreements and cooperation that they are deemed pleasant, but irrelevant to the real problems that divide us.
- This is a real risk for the Alliance, should it develop only as a promoter of programs and projects with no agenda or policy framework underpinning action within its scope and finalities.
- On the other hand, efforts may attempt to address the deeper divisions that exist but, without sufficient clout or political will, they are unlikely to achieve breakthroughs and thereby can be dismissed as hopelessly relegated to kind words leading to no action.
- This is again a real risk that may lead to a culturalisation of political problems based on the denial that addressing cultural diversity is key for sustainable development and peace and therefore a central issue of global and domestic agendas.
- In my view, this is mainly applicable to relations between Western and Muslim communities and societies.
- As John Esposito rightly points out in his recent book “The future of Islam” (2010), “for Americans and Europeans, understanding Islam

and Muslims is both a domestic imperative (to know one's fellow citizens and neighbours) and a foreign policy priority".

- However, in my view, the converse is also true: I mean, the need for more than 1.5 billion Muslims who live within some fifty-seven Muslim majority countries or who "constitute significant minorities in Europe and America" to understand American and European societies, because after all we live in one world.
- So the challenge for the Alliance is to attempt to steer a course in between the twin dangers mentioned above, trying to foster cooperation and partnerships that touch on some of our deepest divisions, involving in these efforts all relevant players and partners.
- In this regard, let me be frank with you and stress two additional points:
 - Firstly – the main challenge is to recognize that we face problems on both sides and there is urgency on both sides to address them;
 - Secondly - national Plans and Regional Strategies are two complementary frameworks to generate a constructive dialogue that delivers.

Excellencies

- The third challenge ahead is both critical and, paradoxically, much easier to address – it concerns the sustainability of the Alliance.
- Let's be serious: with a core operational budget of around 3 million USD each year covering all general operations and small scale programmes the Alliance is simply not able to live up to the high expectations it raises.
- In addition, as contributions are voluntary, the Secretariat faces recurrent cash-flow problems and planning activities is almost impossible.
- This insignificant budget does not reflect the importance of the AoC initiative which you always express.
- So, allow me, Excellencies, to ask for some consistency: you often ask the Alliance to focus on projects – but to develop projects we need funds, otherwise we can have beautiful and powerful ideas but we will be unable to turn them into results.
- I give you an example: the AoC Regional Strategy for South Eastern Europe generated around 50 projects complying with the priorities identified for the region.

- But to implement them we need fresh money. Indeed I have already started some contacts with foundations and I hope to have them on board.

- But support from countries is also indispensable.

- So I would like to urge you to make additional efforts because this lack of resources is impacting very negatively on the capacity of action of the Alliance and can have a paralyzing effect in a very near future.

- I thank you for your attention.