



UNITED NATIONS

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THE SECRETARY-GENERAL

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REMARKS TO THE THIRD FORUM OF
THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Rio de Janeiro, 28 May 2010

President Lula of Brazil,
Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey,
Distinguished Heads of State and Government,
Mr. President of the General Assembly,
Her Highness Sheikha Mozah, President of the Qatar Foundation,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Governors and Mayors,
Excellencies,
Delegates,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Bom Dia.

President Lula, my deepest thanks to you and the Brazilian people for your hospitality and warm welcome.

Muito Obrigado.

To the original co-sponsors of the Alliance of Civilizations – Spain and Turkey – thank you for your consistent support.

I thank High Representative Sampaio for his dedication.

I also commend the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah, for his interfaith initiative, including his call to live an authentic faith that emphasizes dialogue and cooperation.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

We meet at a unique moment.

Times are changing. Power is shifting. Brazil is rising.

I speak not just of the economy of Brazil, but the story of Brazil.

This is a melting pot of cultures, peoples and traditions.

All pulling as one...especially during World Cup season!

There is no better place for the Alliance of Civilizations to meet and take its work forward.

On the surface, it may appear that I come from a different world.

Growing up, my homeland of Korea was one of the most homogenous places on earth.

But I was raised in the wake of the Korean war.

The international community rebuilt my country.

From an early age, I saw the power of cultures uniting in common cause.

I saw solidarity in action.

I am not merely a witness – I am a product of it.

This is not just my history – it is an essential part of who I am.

That is why this Forum means so much to me.

And that is why I know the Alliance of Civilizations matters to the world.

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the beginning, we all knew the Alliance could not be business as usual.

The work could not be left to beautifully written reports stuck in the United Nations library.

We understood the Alliance must be action-oriented.

It must reach far and wide.

Since 2005, the Alliance of Civilizations has been doing just that.

With your support, the Alliance is bringing together journalists from around the globe to confront prejudice and misunderstanding – including the first-of-its-kind joint reporting from Israel and the Arab world.

You are expanding dialogue for young people of different ethnicities in Burundi, promoting mediation and conflict resolution in South Asia, mentoring in immigrant neighborhoods in Europe, and providing jobs for young people throughout the Middle East and North Africa.

At the same time, the Alliance is widening its own network of partners and community of friends. We are pleased to welcome the 100th member, the United States of America.

All this is impressive. But it is only a start.

The Alliance is a process – a work in progress.

In communities where symbols of religious minorities are seen as something to oppose or fear, we need continued engagement.

In places where people are screened out of opportunity because of race, faith or even their name, we have more work to do.

But the mission of the Alliance must go deeper still.

I would like to briefly point to three reasons why.

First, and fundamentally, because your mission is among the most important of the 21st century.

Three-quarters of the major conflicts in the world today have a cultural dimension.

You are seeking to defuse those tensions by finding answers to some of the most urgent issues of our day:

How do we build inclusive societies?

How can we strengthen education and empower women?

How do we drown out the siren songs that divert young people to extremism?

In short, how do we build communities rooted in “*convivencia*” – living together in peace, based on trust and mutual respect?

That leads me to the second reason for deepening our work – because the process of building inclusive societies must itself be inclusive.

It takes each and every one of us.

After all, peace and reconciliation cannot be imposed.

They are seeds, planted by people, nurtured by communities.

Day, after day, after day.

The Alliance cultivates through outreach, through understanding, through education.

And we know that education is more than learning.

Sometimes it is also unlearning.

We must let go of the stereotypes of the monolithic “other”.

We must put an end to labels that do more to divide than define.

The third reason to deepen our work: globalization.

Globalization can both connect and alienate.

We have access to more information, ideas and technology. And yet, fears and hatred are just a mouse click away.

The gains of globalization are more visible -- but so, too, is the feeling among many that those benefits are out of reach.

In many places around the world, such fears cause people to retreat – away from “globalization” into an extreme “localization”.

One that sends the message: “Our way is best”.

Or worse, “There is no other way but my way”.

This creates tension and instability.

Tackling this, too, is the work of the Alliance.

And as we expand all of our efforts, we must do even more to reach out, to listen and to learn from young people.

Tomorrow, I go to Africa. 70 percent of Africans are under the age of 30.

Half the world’s population is under 25, the vast majority in the developing world.

We need to tap this great potential.

They need to see a world of hope and possibility, of quality education and decent work.

Yesterday I met with young people in the Babilonia favela here in Rio de Janeiro.

One young woman said "When I go to wealthy areas, they see *what* I am, not *who* I am."

But she showed all of us.

The young people I met had such passion and commitment to work against discrimination and for a better life.

I learn from you. You learn from me. We grow together.

That was *their* message. That is *our* message

Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am not naive about the challenge.

There is unease in our world.

Tensions, rooted in fear. Fear, driven by ignorance.

We live in a world where, too often, division sells.

It wins votes. It gets ratings. It is much easier to blame others than to think for oneself.

And yet wherever I go, I have found something else – a growing realization that we are in this together.

A sharper awareness that my child's future depends on your child's future.

A greater understanding that we are a single global family with many members and no monoliths.

We are not there yet.

The journey is long.

But I take strength from the Brazilian proverb:

Goodwill makes the road shorter.

Your goodwill and your good works are making all our roads shorter.

I can see on the horizon a world that understands that, together, we are better.

I can hear shouting replaced with listening.

I can feel a force committed to making it happen.

Governments, civil society, the private sector, the faith community, young people.

You - and all this Alliance represents.

A global social movement.

An Alliance of Humanity.

Regardless of religious tradition, we have a common faith: a faith in our shared future.

Let us harness our common humanity and make a better world.