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# ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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**Opening Session**

**Conference on Ethnic cities**

*Rome*  
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Your Excellency, Under-Secretary of State Vincenzo Scotti  
Excellencies  
Dear Participants

- I should like to thank Under-Secretary of State Vincenzo Scotti, not only for convening this meeting, but also for inviting me to attend it.
- As a former Mayor of Lisbon, I have the greatest personal interest in the topical issue of cities. But there is much more than that.
- In my capacity as the United Nations High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) I have been trying to promote an in-depth reflection about the central role of cities in managing cultural diversity in our globalizing times.
- Between the first high level roundtable on “Inter-ethnic cities” that the UNAOC co-organized with Italy in September 2009 in New York and this initiative, in the Rio Forum last year we promoted a Thematic Session on ‘Living Together in Urban Societies’. This was designed by the urban researcher Phil Wood who is one of the leading exponents – in Europe - of the path from multiculturalism to interculturalism.
- So it is with great pleasure that I welcome the idea of organizing this meeting as we desperately need to develop and implement new approaches to our living together in one world.

## Excellencies

- As was said in Rio last year, today's urban communities are becoming more and more diverse and it would be easy for cities to fall into the mindset of considering this a problem or even a threat. However, for cities with the vision and the skill to embrace their diversity and conceive new modes of *convivencia*, living together – cohabitation? there is the potential of great social, economic and cultural rewards.
- Whilst the voices of national institutions may seem to dominate the discourse on migration, cities will have an increasingly important role to play in turning the tide.
- Ultimately, it may be the interaction between global factors of economics and ideology and the local policies of city halls and everyday practices of city streets that determine whether or not we can live together and co-operate in this changing world.
- So I very much hope that your conference will explore this local dimension and particularly the advantages cities can achieve by overcoming barriers of ethnicity, culture, social status and distance and connecting people - across neighborhoods and across continents.
- We definitely need to accelerate the implementation of intercultural cities and develop the sense of a new intercultural citizenship – be it in Europe, in the Euro-Mediterranean region or in Asia, Africa or the Americas.
- A new intercultural citizenship is really what our diverse societies need in order to become inclusive and make of cohesive diversity their social glue.

- What we really need is not to heighten divisions and divides by reifying the idea of distinct ethnic groups living apart. What we need is to live together in a cross-cultural polity.

Dear participants

- You know that the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations was created precisely to boost intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation in order to prepare the world's citizens to deal with diversity as an advantage and a unique asset to meet the challenges of our globalizing world.
- But we all also know – too well and many times for all the wrong reasons – that “communicating across difference is not easy and the greater the cultural distance, the more difficult it gets”.
- I wish this Conference could contribute to shape an agenda for cities. As far as the Alliance of Civilizations is concerned, we are ready to welcome your ideas and push forward to their implementation.
- I wish you good work.
- Many thanks