



**Alliance of Civilizations
Group of Friends Meeting**

New York, 26 March 2008
Summary Report

The purpose of the Alliance of Civilizations (GoF) meeting was to provide an update to GoF members on progress achieved since the First AoC Forum was held in Madrid in January 2008, to invite the views of GoF members on the current and future direction of the AoC, and to highlight areas in which the AoC hopes to receive information or support from GoF members.

I. Opening Remarks

The meeting was opened by President Sampaio, High Representative for the AoC.

1. Regarding the AoC Forum (15-16 January 2008), President Sampaio thanked the host Government of Spain and noted that the Forum had met three main objectives: 1. profiling the AoC Forum as a key gathering that provides space for dialogue among a wide range of actors; 2. branding the Forum as a results-oriented event – i.e. as an international platform for launching innovative projects and building new partnerships; and 3. enhancing the profile of the Alliance, by showcasing the strong commitment of its members to turn its political objectives into *glocal* deliverables.

2. The AoC must now enter a phase of intense action and follow-up which should build on existing resources, projects, and programmes, and which should rely heavily on action from GoF members as well as civil society actors to ensure its success and sustainability. There are three priority areas in which GoF member support and participation would be critical:

Development of National Plans for cross-cultural dialogue and appointment of AoC Focal Points. Four countries have submitted national plans. The national strategies developed by EU members in the framework of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue-2008 could easily be used and expanded upon as a basis for AoC National Plans. Similarly, the 1st OIC Observatory Report on Islamophobia (May 2007-March 2008) contains a set of recommendations for actions that could be used by countries as a basis to draft National Plans for cross-cultural dialogue. To assist and build on this process, President Sampaio advanced two proposals:

- To create a small Task Force of 5-10 Focal Points of States and International Organizations that would, with support from the AoC Secretariat, draft a template for AoC National Strategies and outline a programme of seminars to be proposed to GoF members to stimulate the sharing of best practices in AoC-related fields.
- To convene, in late September 2008, a meeting of Focal Points to stimulate interaction between governments and international organizations regarding their efforts to manage cultural diversity. The future AoC Ambassadors could also be called to give advice and help in this regard. The High Representative urged GoF members to appoint Focal Points to facilitate such interaction. Focal Points should be coordinators for the implementation of AoC-related actions within their countries or organizations and should have direct communication with the AoC Secretariat, with their respective UN Missions kept informed.

Boosting regional AoC action. The High Representative intends to ask AoC Ambassadors to form regional clusters of AoC Supporters (community leaders, experts, etc.) to engage in AoC initiatives and to act as driving forces in translating general AoC recommendations and prescriptions into local and regional settings and also the global concepts and language of the AoC into the different cultures of each region. The AoC Secretariat will present a Strategic Paper on the AoC regional network in the near future. The High Representative highlighted the Euro-Mediterranean region as an area in which several international organizations are available to assist in developing cooperative cross-cultural initiatives, noting that the AoC would open discussions with them on how it can contribute to ongoing efforts to improve inter-cultural dialogue, including inter-faith issues, within and among European and predominantly Muslim societies and communities and to collaborate with the project for the Union pour la Méditerranée.

Investing in city diplomacy. The AoC could serve as a catalyst to promote a set of initiatives of city-to-city diplomacy and to help local and municipal authorities establish conditions for sustainable peace between divided communities and societies. To develop these initiatives, President Sampaio intends to participate in the 1st World Congress in City Diplomacy to be held in June in The Hague and to consult in advance with relevant partners to prepare a paper on an AoC Strategy for city diplomacy.

3. Update on current activities: The two main AoC projects – the Online Clearing House (www.aocmedialiteracy.org) and the Rapid Response Media Mechanism (RRMM – www.globalexpertfinder.org) have each been launched and are being used.

While the Clearinghouse was launched on the initial theme of Media Literacy Education, the AoC Secretariat is exploring a second theme – on Education about Religion and Belief – to be developed in the coming year.

The RRMM's website features a list of experts on matters of cross-cultural understanding to be used as a service by media editors and producers. This "Global Expert Finder" is to be expanded in the coming months to feature a larger and more diverse collection of individual profiles and features.

With regard to the expected release of the film by Dutch MP Geert Wilder about the Koran, President Sampaio made two points:

1. The Dutch Government is to be commended for the intensive work behind the scenes with number of key players in order to contain overreaction.
2. If the film is released and it has defamatory content vis-à-vis Islam and Koran, it is President Sampaio's intention to mobilize the RRMM to generate op-ed articles and non-inflammatory coverage as well as to circulate an Op Ed among GoF members to be signed at the highest level.

President Sampaio noted that he would follow developments closely in order to gauge whether and when any action should be taken.

In conclusion, President Sampaio informed GoF members that he would meet with the UN Secretary General and with the Permanent Representatives of OIC countries. He will present to the SG the first yearly Report on the AoC activities. He will also raise with the SG the question of the place of the AoC in the UN system.

GoF members are also invited to send by 1 June, 2008 proposals on how to improve dialogue within the GoF meetings at the Ministerial Level with a view to the September 2008 GoF Ministerial meeting in New York. With more than 80 members now, it has become necessary to explore formats for meetings that could maximize inter-action, dialogue and debate.

II. Remarks by Delegates

Within the general discussion, statements were made by representatives of (in alphabetical order) Bangladesh, Brazil, Council of Europe, Egypt, Greece, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, The Netherlands, Portugal, Republic of Korea, Qatar, Slovenia, Spain, Tanzania, Turkey, and Yemen.

The participants expressed continued support for the AoC and made a number of observations, suggestions, and commitments:

1. The First AoC Forum was widely viewed as a success based on the broad-based and high-level of participation as well as on the practical initiatives and commitments to action that were announced. The importance of translating these commitments into programmatic action that could impact on people's lives was stressed by many participants.
2. Political momentum behind the AoC initiative had been demonstrated by the presentation of National Plans for Cross-Cultural dialogue by some GoF members as well as by the designation of focal points by several GoF members.
3. The AoC was encouraged to play the role of a facilitator of exchanges of good practice between GoF members through dialogue with the designated focal points and implementation and expansion of the on-line Clearinghouse. Such exchange would support and help build the national capacities of GoF members to address issues related to cross-cultural understanding with insight into how others have managed them. Some GoF members indicated an interest to support the development of the Clearinghouse.
4. The degree to which AoC-related projects are generating tangible results needs to be documented and shared with GoF members. In response to this point, an update was provided on three projects launched at the First AoC Forum:
 - The Media Literacy Education Clearinghouse: This website went public less than one month ago (www.aocmedialiteracy.org). Statistics on its use can be obtained easily and distributed when requested. Since the website went public, 16 formal partnerships with universities in diverse regions around the world have been established and more are joining every week. Those partnerships are critical because these universities feed and disseminate the content of the website.
 - The Rapid Response Media Mechanism: The website went public in the last month (www.globalexpertfinder.org). There are 60 experts profiled on the website and they have already been connected to media editors and producers for commentary on issues of cross-cultural relations. Initial responses have been positive, including proactive requests from media organizations to invite some of these experts as spokespeople on relevant topics. Meetings of media editors and producers will be held in 2008 in different regions around the

world to expand use of the service and the AoC plans to more than double the number of experts profiled on the site by 2009.

- Regarding Youth: There is also available through the AoC website (www.unaoc.org) the application process for the Youth Solidarity Funds, which is in its pilot phase. Applications are welcome up to the end of April. Partnerships have been established with youth-led networks and regional youth platforms to serve as reviewers of proposals – initial funds are to be allocated in mid-2008.
5. Turkey confirmed its plan to host the Second AoC Forum in 2009 and Brazil and Portugal each offered to host future AoC Fora.
 6. Several GoF members commented on the matter of the film expected to be released by Dutch MP Geert Wilders.
 7. Many echoed the High Representative's praise for the efforts taken by the Dutch Government to contain negative repercussions.
 8. Several stressed the importance of freedom of expression while also noting the importance that this right be exercised responsibly and not in a way that infringes on the rights of others to, for example, practice their religion or as a license to denigrate minority communities.
 9. GoF members welcomed any constructive and positive contributions to address the matter and a number of them welcomed the mobilization of the Rapid Response Media Mechanism in such matters.
 10. The Permanent Representative of the Netherlands noted the Dutch government's strong opposition to Mr. Wilders' view of Islam and stressed that it is not representative of official Dutch policies. He asserted that the Dutch government respects all religions and beliefs and seeks to combat hatred, discrimination, and intolerance. Statements of the Prime Minister and of the Foreign Minister of the Netherlands were made available to all GoF members.
 11. Several GoF members urged the AoC to build on related efforts and to avoid duplication of efforts. To this end, a number of upcoming events, regional conferences, and summits addressing AoC-related themes were noted by GoF members.

III. Closure

The High Representative closed the meeting by thanking those members who had already appointed Focal Points, presented National Plans, and/or made commitments to support the advancement of AoC objectives through financial commitments to the AoC Voluntary Trust Fund or through the convening of regional events and initiatives related to the AoC.

He underscored that National Plans need not be extremely elaborate or ambitious, but rather might consist of the compiling of all efforts related to AoC objectives that are already being undertaken by a GoF member so that they may be shared and discussed with others. He also encouraged all GoF members to utilize the AoC Clearinghouse and Rapid Response Media Mechanism to interact with one another.