



**Alliance of Civilizations
Group of Friends Meeting**

New York, 10 June 2011

Summary Report

At the invitation of the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, President Sampaio, and under his chairmanship, the Group of Friends (GoF) held its second 2011 meeting at the level of Heads of Missions on 10 June, New York.

The agenda focused on the examination of three draft working papers submitted by the High Representative a few days earlier:

- The draft of the third Implementation Plan for 2011
- A draft concept paper for the Doha Forum
- A draft note for the Replenishment Mechanism

Delegations had been invited to comment and make additional suggestions on the draft documents. Because of their late circulation, it was understood that additional comments could be sent until June 19.

Opening remarks

Having welcomed all the participants, the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, President Jorge Sampaio, first drew attention to the fact that it is the first time that the Implementation Plan (IP) is discussed with delegations before being submitted to the Secretary General, in a move to strengthen co-ownership. Concerning new initiatives in the 3rd Implementation plan, he emphasized five considerations: the new context in the MENA region; the ongoing debates in Europe about how to reconcile diversity and societal cohesion; the influence of religion on peace, security and development; the reinforcement of the Alliance as a UN soft power tool for dialogue and peace; and the suggestion made by HH Sheikha Mozah of Qatar to have the 4th Annual Global Forum in Doha focus on possible connections between the UNAOC's mission and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

President Sampaio pointed out the role of the Global Forums in bringing new perspectives and enabling global conversation on topical issues, and expressed expectations that the Doha Forum will be a turning point for the Alliance in terms of raising its visibility and reinforcing commitments for action, particularly by bringing to the table a limited number of targeted global initiatives. He emphasized that the Alliance will remain focused on its original mandate, and will not shift to become a development-focused programme. However, and with regards to the framework of the Doha Forum, it makes sense to ask how the Alliance can support the MDG agenda through its focus on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue.

The High Representative underlined the importance of integrating the outcomes of the Forum into the broader agenda of the IP, and the aim that the Forum would lead to global commitments which

could be framed within a “Doha Chart”. With regards to the concept paper, GoF members will be kept informed prior to the Group’s meeting in September.

Turning to the financial situation and the Replenishment proposal, President Sampaio called upon the GoF’s assistance in identifying potential donors, and pointed to the need to provide the donor community with a loose mechanism of consultation and exchange of ideas regarding funds management. The High Representative thanked Qatar for the opportunity to hold a Pre-Forum consultation with civil society organizations in the beginning of May in Doha. These consultations helped reinforcing the action-oriented perspective of the Alliance.

The Representative of Qatar, (NB the name will not appear in the final version: Dr. Hassan Ibrahim Al Mohannadi, vice-chair of the Qatar Committee for the Alliance of Civilizations), opened by emphasizing HH. Sheikha Mozah’s vision to enrich the Alliance’s agenda and strengthen its role in today’s world. The Doha Forum is an opportunity to raise the political commitment to the Alliance and to promote the link between culture and the MDGs. The MDGs do not explicitly take into account bridge-building between cultures. Qatar believes that development should be able to capitalize on the gains resulting from the dynamic interaction between cultures, and hopes that the Doha Forum will make a difference in this respect. The Forum will also focus on developing a set of goals and indicators for the 4 fields of action of the UNAOC. Qatar will present a Doha Plan of Action to encompass a number of goals to be achieved through the development of concrete and tangible proposals. This Plan should show that the real fault-lines of the world are social and economical, rather than cultural or religious. As noted by President Sampaio, the GoF should be offered the opportunity to hold preliminary discussions on the Doha Plan of Action at the GoF meeting in September. Qatar expresses positive surprise over the strong commitments and exhibited at the Doha Pre-Forum, hoping that the Civil Society forum was the first of many to come, and that in December in Doha it will be possible to agree on the creation of a permanent AOC Civil Society Platform. Qatar commits itself to making the Replenishment Session a success.

The Representatives of the two sponsor countries thanked the High Representative for convening a timely meeting of the Group of Friends and for his continued leadership. They welcomed the contribution of Qatar and agreed with the suggestion of promoting synergies between UNAOC objectives and MDGs. They both also expressed their support for the draft Implementation Plan. The Representative of Spain (NB We seem to develop the practice of not mentioning names and titles in the body of the document) welcomed a focus on achieving results and an action-oriented approach. He also recalled that the Alliance’s mandate is to diffuse tensions that fuel polarization, and stressed that the Alliance is a preventive diplomacy tool working towards peace. He further commented that while the mandate and agenda of the Alliance sometimes seems too ambitious, it is still very much needed. The Representative of Turkey underlined the goal of developing an appropriate context for cross-cultural collaboration, and encouraged the Alliance to continue to emphasize commitment to human dignity and other values common to humanity. With regards to replenishment, both ambassadors emphasized the need for sufficient resources as well as the need to make these resources more predictable. They described this need as one of the biggest challenges to the sustainability of the Alliance, and also stressed that a growing recognition of the Alliance at the global level is necessary. Both expressed their commitment to help the Alliance to achieve results.

Highlights of the discussion:

About 20 delegations contributed to the discussion, many of them expressing their appreciation and gratitude for the work of the High Representative, the work of Qatar, and the steady support of the sponsors. The Director General of IOM attended in person and delivered remarks.

The following short summary includes the main positions and suggestions emerging from the discussion on the 3 main issues on the agenda. Some of the delegations recalled their specific involvement and achievements at regional and national levels. These positions are attributed to the individual delegations under item 4.

1. The Draft of the Third Implementation Plan of 2011

NB for HiRep: in this section, we have the practice of mentioning countries in bracket for your own information, but not in the final version circulated to Delegations. Please confirm whether this is fine or you would prefer the references to countries to be shared with everyone in the final version as well. MS.

The Third Implementation Plan was acknowledged as a thorough document (Portugal, OIC), and some delegations expressed feelings of ownership with regards to the Plan (Council of Europe, Bulgaria). Several delegations welcomed the opportunity to review the draft of the Plan prior to its submission to the Secretary-General, stating that this contributed to enhancing the visibility of the UNAOC. There is a need to ensure a more public profile to the Alliance (Egypt), and a communication strategy should be further developed (Finland). The work of the AOC should also be promoted at the national level (Romania).

One delegation expressed strong support for the unique agenda of the Alliance, considering it to be more important than ever as a forum for intercultural dialogue. Human rights, development and tolerance are fundamental shared values. The four focus areas of the Alliance offer many possibilities with respect to contributing to the MDGs while at the same time avoiding duplication (European Union). Several other delegations agreed with these statements (Hungary, Sweden, Italy, Slovenia). Migration, one of the four pillars of the Alliance, is absent in the MDGs, yet it is necessary to take migration into account in order to meet several of the MDGs. The Alliance helps promote real facts about migration in a world with increased anxiety and anti-migration sentiments, a world in which the tremendous contribution of the vast majority of migrants is too often overshadowed by Islamophobia, as recalled by the Director General of IOM. Further discussion of the MDGs can be found under item 2, as a topic for the Doha Forum.

Regarding areas of focus in the work of the Alliance, in view of the "Arab Spring", the transformation processes towards democracy should be emphasized, as well as the protection of human rights (Austria). Democracy inclusiveness should be a core issue in the Implementation Plan (IPU). Enhancing intercultural and interfaith dialogue is a noble objective of the Plan, and there is a need to engage individuals in the work of the AOC as they, along with civil society organizations, are important building blocks in the promotion of peace, respect, and understanding. Change starts at the family level (Egypt). The Alliance must also play a more active role in fighting intolerance against religious and cultural groups (Egypt). A multi-stakeholder approach to the Implementation Plan is essential, and should involve further emphasis on civil society, the academic community, and the corporate sector (Finland). One delegation underlined that the Implementation Plan should focus further on cultural diversity, and not only on interreligious dialogue, since that could be a restriction in terms of the scope of the activities. The comments in the Plan concerning reinforced action at

grassroots levels were welcomed as a very powerful approach (Council of Europe). Similarly, the intention to mainstream youth participation into larger initiatives of the AOC is a good idea that was also mentioned in the HLG report in 2006. It is important to not see the Youth Strategy as the main field of NGO management for the Alliance, but as a common strategy of government and NGOs (Council of Europe).

Some delegations expressed concern that the Alliance would transform itself into a new international agency. One delegation worried that the Alliance would be competing with agencies such as UNICEF, IOM, or UNDP, and warned that it should remain a light and flexible space for networking (Belgium). The High Representative of the Alliance took the opportunity to comment on some misunderstandings concerning its objectives, and stressed the continuation of the Alliance's mandate as intended by the HLG Report of 2006. Some delegations noted the role as a forum for dialogue as a key function of the Alliance (Bulgaria, Montenegro), and commended the flexibility of the Alliance (Italy). Referring to the Media Programme, one delegation (Iran) suggested that the Alliance working methods with states and civil societies may deserve some clarification.

With regards to Regional Strategies, the many existing projects and initiatives require multi-level efforts, including at the media level and at the governmental level. One delegation identified the coordination of efforts in the field of history teaching as a regional priority area of action (Council of Europe). On a final note, one delegation requested an evaluation of the implementation of the Alliance's mandate (Finland).

2. The Draft Concept Paper for the Doha Forum

A number of the delegations welcomed a focus on the link between the mission of the Alliance and the Millennium Development Goals at the Doha Forum in December (Egypt, Austria, OIC, Finland, Council of Europe). The work of the Alliance may be seen as a pillar to achieving the MDGs (Egypt). At the same time, duplication in work is to be avoided (Austria, Belgium, Finland, Slovenia), and one should be careful not to overburden the Secretariat (OIC). The realization of the MDGs is part of the universal efforts to achieve human dignity, and the Alliance has a fundamental role of promoting human dignity as a way to ensure understanding among cultures and religions (Egypt). One delegation looks forward to fruitful discussions at the Doha Forum around the concept of human dignity, and expects the outcome to help promoting the garnering of collective will (Portugal). This view was echoed by another delegation, who stressed that the MDGs as a topic for the Doha event is interesting and productive, and that discussing MDGs means discussing human rights (Council of Europe). This discussion should however not be limited to the developing world; it must also include Europe, where many people struggle for justice, security and gender equality.

Some delegations emphasized the positive effects of NGO participation and partnerships at the Forum (Austria, Slovenia). Other important partnerships include those with universities (Austria). One delegation stressed that the important issues to be addressed in Doha include Islamophobia, as well as the role of media literacy in combating discrimination (OIC). The impacts of religion and religious diversity on other areas of concern to the global forum must be stressed (Portugal, Italy). One delegation recalled that a workshop for lawmakers took place at the Rio Forum, and expressed interest in bringing parliamentarians to discussions on cultural understanding and dialogue also at the Doha Forum (IPU). One delegation hoped for a discussion of mid-term goals for the Alliance at the Forum, and expressed confidence in the upcoming Forum's contribution to reinforced visibility of the Alliance – particularly in underrepresented regions (Slovenia).

In light of the 10th anniversary of the Declaration on Cultural Diversity, one delegation called for reflection around the importance of cultural diversity in relation to security, development and human rights (UNESCO).

3. The draft note for the Replenishment Mechanism

Several delegations echoed the importance of sufficient and stable funding in order to make the Alliance a sustainable endeavor (Portugal, Turkey, Spain, Slovenia, EU, Finland, Sweden, Italy). Predictable financial resources are necessary (Portugal). One delegation expressed concern over the challenges facing the Regional Strategy for South Eastern Europe, and called for addressing the budgetary and other issues that could compromise the implementation of the Strategy (Bulgaria).

Several delegations maintained that contributions should continue to be made on a purely voluntary basis (Belgium, Austria). This, of course, is not in contradiction with the proposals for new funding replenishment mechanism, which received expressions of support from various delegations (Sweden, Italy, EU). The funding mechanism presented in the concept paper for replenishment should be understood as including funding through partnerships. One delegation encouraged further consultation before any decisions are taken regarding the formation of a Partners' Forum (Finland). The same also suggested that the Financial and Administrative Framework Agreement between the European Union and the United Nations (FAFA) was a way to channel funds, which needs to be more systematically explored.

4. Announcement of initiatives and achievements

In the course of the discussions, many delegations referred to specific involvement and initiatives taken at regional and national levels to support the goals of the Alliance. These comments may be summarized as follows:

Spain, which co-organizes with Italy a seminar on aspects of freedom of religion in Florence the following week, will work with the High Representative and Turkey toward a successful Replenishment Session in October.

Turkey will organize the First Replenishment Session and hopes to achieve results with regards to providing the Alliance with regular and sufficient financial resources.

IOM looks forward to working with the UNAOC to ensure that migration – “Mankind’s oldest anti-poverty strategy”- is seen as a tool for cross-cultural understanding and poverty reduction.

The European Union will endeavor to identify areas in the Implementation Plan with agreed added value, for financial support.

UNESCO has been an active and supportive member of the GoF, and has worked together with the Alliance on a number of projects such as the “Do One Thing for Diversity” campaign, and the Dialogue of Cultures in March. UNESCOs 7th International Youth Forum will take place in Paris in November. The 10th Anniversary of UNESCO’s Declaration on Cultural Diversity offers an opportunity to reflect on challenges in the new century.

OIC is keen to further invigorate its cooperation with the AOC, and hopes for result-oriented dialogue. Proposals will be made to address religious hatred and foster media literacy in the context of the Doha Forum.

Hungary referred to several contributions to the Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean.

Sweden will continue to support the work of the Alliance, including through funding, in order to guarantee it’s viability.

Montenegro is working on a National Plan to foster cross-cultural communication, and is committed to regional cooperation regarding projects under both the South Eastern European and the Mediterranean Strategies, such as the Summer School.

Italy recalled that it was about to host an international seminar on religious freedom with focus on Christian Minorities, jointly organized with Spain in Florence on 13 and 14 June 2011, under the auspices of the AOC.

Romania has promoted the AOC at the national level. The First National Plan of Romania includes a summer school on youth and developments regarding interethnic cities. Romania held conferences with civil society organizations, a seminar on education in cooperation with Spain. Special efforts were also made to ensure media interest and coverage on UNAOC issues and activities.

The Council of Europe, which takes ownership of the draft IP, will continue to contribute to the implementation of action plans developed under the Regional Strategy for South East Europe as well as the Mediterranean Regional Strategy. It is steering a History project under the SEE Action Plan. The CoE sees the reference in the IP on using media to counter incendiary messages as an excellent opportunity for joint work, as it has launched new program for young bloggers on this issue.

Slovenia recently pledged a contribution to the Trust Fund.