

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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“Women and the Alliance of Civilizations – challenges and opportunities”

Regional Seminar

*Buenos Aires,
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Honourable President of the Republic, Dr. Cristina Fernández de Kirchner
Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship,
Mr. Jorge Taiano

Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Spain,
Mr Miguel Angel Moratinos

Honourable Minister of State of the Republic of Turkey,
Professor Mehmet Aydin

Honourable Iberian-American Secretary General, Dr Enrique Iglésias
Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I would first of all voice my best thanks to the Argentinean authorities through Madam President Kirchner, not only for the organization of this initiative which was so generously arranged under the auspices of the Alliance of Civilizations, but also for the personal invitation I received to take part in it.

- I also wish to express thanks, in the name of all participants, for the hospitality awarded us, which allows us to appreciate the values of friendship and civility which underlie the Alliance of Civilizations, as features of humanity common to all that enable peaceful coexistence among peoples.

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- My presence in this opening ceremony of the Seminar “Women and the Alliance for Civilizations” has a very special significance. I want to acquaint you with my interest in this theme and to let you know how interested I am in the results of your work.
- As you are certainly aware, in the context of the Alliance of Civilizations and in the Report on which it is based, Women and Gender issues are not considered as such.
- We can justly ask ourselves if this is a voluntary or an involuntary omission. We can equally ask ourselves as to the correctness of the omission itself.
- But such a discussion is of limited value and use and, very probably, will end in a conceptual dispute that, due to its generality, will only screen what is effectively important.
- In my view, three points are of the utmost importance: to heed the specific problems and tasks women are confronted with in the different cultural contexts; to empower women and strengthen their capacity to act as catalysts for development and social change; to enhance their capability to generate consensus and dialogue, especially in situations of conflict and discontent in their communities.

- Therefore, it is my opinion that gender mainstreaming and perspectives, although not specifically tackled in the Report on the Alliance of Civilizations, must, as I previously said, be placed primarily in the achievement of its objectives.
- Women should be primarily placed under three headings: firstly, as a prioritized constituency within the Alliance's four areas of action, education, youth, media and migration; secondly, as vocal and active agents implementing the principles and values of the Alliance, especially in communities of greater need; lastly, as potential mediators and facilitators in mitigating local conflicts and discontent.
- It is my belief that these issues can, in no way, can be ignored within the scope of the Alliance of Civilizations. This is due to two basic reasons:
 - Firstly, because the status of women is a powerful barometer of the state of human rights, on which the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations initiative is based, as well as the degree of inclusiveness and equality of opportunities between people;
 - Secondly because, in a certain way, it represents a prime cultural issue, almost always toughening our difficulties of living together, due to our differing concepts, values and beliefs, and to the specific organization of each society.

- In my view, good governance of cultural diversity, which is a major issue of our time, must include gender mainstreaming strategies. Although it is also important to note the many ways of approaching the issue, and the multiple models to carry out the formal principle of universal rights and equality in treatment.
- It follows that, since our century is being predicted as that of the assertion of minorities, it is necessary that gender mainstreaming becomes progressively delinked from the limitations it has been associated with, in order to fully value the social, and cultural virtues of gender-based differences and perspectives.
- For all these reasons, and as already stated, I salute this Argentinean initiative and await the results of this regional seminar, hoping that it becomes an example to similar projects in other parts of the world.

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- I also wish to avail myself of this opportunity, by taking this initiative as an example, to briefly acquaint you with my views on the regional foundations of the Alliance of Civilizations, in order that it progressively becomes a sustainable initiative, not only in space but in time, without being loaded by a heavy bureaucratic structure, the means for which are anyway not available.
- The first block of this building is: national plans for inter-cultural dialogue, with clear policies in the fields of education, youth,

migration and the media, guided towards the development of a culture of peace, dialogue and mutual respect among peoples regardless of distinctions of any kind, based on concepts of good governance of cultural diversity.

- Then the second block: regional initiatives, propelled either by existing organizations or regional processes, or by a country or group of countries of a given region. In the current case, the Alliance should aim to build its role as a catalyst and/or coordinator in the heart of the United Nations regional Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), in order to later weave, from this nerve centre, a network of partnerships with other agencies and specialized bodies of the United Nations system, and any other intergovernmental organizations in the region. Such a move, with time, will allow for fuller use of the UN's own agencies so that redundancies and duplications can be avoided and, simultaneously, the Alliance can act with unity, coherence and effectiveness.

- And the third block: that of associative networks – cities, foundations, schools, universities, think tanks, corporations, NGO's, churches and confessional groups which, federated in the Alliance of Civilizations, and through the endorsement of its aims and objectives, establish partnerships and develop common activities.

- In very general terms, it is within the framework of a dynamic movement such as this that I can better view the Alliance carrying out its global vocation to build bridges between societies, to promote dialogue and understanding, and to forge the collective will to address the world's imbalances, such as is contained in its inspiring Report.
- I really think that only through a strong regional footing – based on an adequate level of national participation – can the Alliance de-globalize, so to speak, its universal objectives and produce local results.

Dear Friends,

- The task of the Alliance of Civilizations is neither a one day affair nor even that of one sole generation. At the limit, it aims to carry out the Kantian dream of universal peace...
- In this sense, it encapsulates something which some will quickly entitle as utopian, undervaluing the initiative. But we can, on the contrary, without losing sight of reality, see it as an assertion of a collective will to change the world; and then say, 'enough' to dark prophecies about an unstoppable inter-cultural and inter-religious collision.

- We can see in the Alliance of Civilizations the expression of a civilizational jolt and a collective endeavour to improve the human environment, such as very recently the topic of environmental protection and bio-diversity reached the top of the international political agenda.
- What is certain is that issues of cultural diversity due to the growing mobility of the people and to universal communications in real time have gained a new urgency. What is certain is that, since September 11, we have entered a stage of dangerous international belligerence, which is permanently echoed in the global village in which we live and which we have been unable or even known how, to control.

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Dear Friends

- One first item I have as certain: the Alliance of Civilizations is born from a new objective – that of becoming an area of open dialogue, which can overcome the usual cleavages and blockades that have topped the debate in multilateral forums, thwarting decisions and creating pre-aligned blocks – Northern versus Southern countries; West versus Islam, developed world versus developing world etc etc

- A second item also seems obvious to me: in order to be developed as an enlarged area for dialogue and cooperation, the Alliance cannot position itself as just another commission or committee of the United Nations, neither as just a restricted version of a general assembly. The members who comprise it must see themselves as partners or owners of a common project rather than parties in turf battles.
- The objective of the Alliance is neither to recreate enclaves, nor to reproduce known dividing lines in its own heartland. On the contrary, the aim is to safeguard the essential; its aim also is, without ignoring disagreements, to accept that we may dialogue without necessarily agreeing to everything, and above all that we can work together while not allowing misunderstandings to degenerate into conflict; its aim, finally, is to bring out, from the same lyre, chords that echo a certain contrapuntal harmony
- It is obvious that the Alliance of Civilizations will always be considered and used by each of its member States as a tool for their own external policies. But that is a very positive point since it brings out the strength of its assertion. It must not however be allowed to be a channel for the rhetoric of the war of civilizations or to be used as just another missile.
- I am however confident, since I am certain that the commitments undertaken in Madrid will be carried out in concert and with

determination and that, within time, the sum of all the efforts will make a difference.

- For this reason, please allow me to finish by renewing my thanks for this initiative and wishing all participants a fruitful conference.
- Thank you all very much.