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ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

ADDRESS

Working breakfast with the Honourable Kevin Rudd, Member of
Parliament and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade

*Melbourne, Deakin Prime,
8h15 – 10h00 am
6 October 2011*

Honourable Kevin Rudd, MP and Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade
Excellencies,
Distinguished Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am very grateful to the Honourable Kevin Rudd for making time to convene this gathering which is a great opportunity to share with you a number of thoughts on the Alliance of Civilizations, a United Nations' initiative that I am proud to lead.
- I am indeed most thrilled to be in Australia, a fundamental member of the Alliance of Civilizations in which you can play an important role because of your unique model of multiculturalism.
- I am here precisely to explore further how to develop closer cooperation with this country, to learn more about this vibrant society and how it is coping with the huge challenges of managing cultural diversity in our global age of insecurity and change.
- Let me praise your efforts and your achievements as a culturally diverse society and as a multicultural democracy. I know that sometimes we lack distance to view our problems in the proper perspective so that we tend to focus on failures and to amplify the magnitude of our shortcomings.

- But both as an insider in these kinds of issues – which are at the core of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations – and, shall we say, with an outsider’s eye on your society, I can assure you that there are so many things that you can share with others – best practices, policies implemented and indeed your vision of multiculturalism.

- I know quite well that this word “multiculturalism” has no agreed meaning and that in other parts of the world – notably in Europe – it polarizes the debates and produces a noxious effect.

- But one should not be afraid of using words when they stand for strong convictions, principles and values and when they spell out a vision, a strategy and an agenda of a success story over so many decades, as is the case of multiculturalism in Australia.

Excellencies,

- In our globalized times all countries are facing cultural challenges in changing conditions and new trends in societies. We cannot ignore that new dividing lines are emerging, creating a breeding ground for all kinds of extremisms and anti-migration populism sometimes mixed with anti-Islam populism.

- But this means two things. One, increasing popular concerns over culture, migration and identity are a wake-up call and a reminder of a crisis of trust in the system that has to be restored. Two, multiculturalism in many cases has to be revisited, by acknowledging its pitfalls but also its strengths, and making it capable of responding to new challenges ahead.
- Re-visiting multiculturalism might lead to delineate a new, progressive form of multiculturalism that basically prevents throwing the baby out with the bathwater.
- By a progressive form of multiculturalism I mean two things: on the one hand, spelling out multiculturalism as a two-way street with no barriers between minorities and the majority population and where the cultural needs of the mainstream matter as much as respect for the cultures of individuals belonging to minorities; on the other hand, to focus on cultures and identities as a dynamic, open and inclusive process that provides individuals with a sense of belonging, community and collective mission.
- Democracies of the 21st century have to elaborate further on how to deal with cultural diversity and how public policies should respond to it. A kind of cultural pluralism based on the core concept of citizens as equals in the public sphere is needed to play down the politics of differences that will only lead to social fragmentation and exclusion. At the same time, attention has also to be re-focused on cultural symbols and a vibrant state-building narrative because all individuals have to be provided with a sense of belonging, community and collective mission

that stimulates self-esteem and autonomy in order to progress as individuals within social structures.

- Indeed all societies are different, answers have to be locally rooted and there is no ready-made way-out or an all-in-one solution. But as we live in one world under the same roof, some global thinking is needed to devise a common vision for living together, to find shared strategies and develop new tools and policies.
- This is all about the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC).

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The Alliance is a 5 years' old initiative of the United Nations that is mainly focused on promoting a culture of respect, tolerance, dialogue and peace based on universal human rights and human dignity.
- The UNAOC stands for the fourth pillar of sustainable development, promoting good governance - or democratic governance - of cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, understanding and trust within and among societies.
- After all, it brings forth a new agenda for living together, covering four main fields of action – education, youth, media and migration.

- In our somehow polarized world, the Alliance gives special attention to improving relations between the so-called Western and Muslim societies by de-constructing prejudices, misconceptions and stereotypes that fuel fears, feed hostility, ignite tensions and spark violence; by promoting education for valuing cultural diversity and learning how to live together with our differences and our commonalities.

- As a new United Nations soft power tool, the Alliance plays an advocacy role to raise global public awareness about present cultural challenges and the need to provide people with a modern sense of belonging, community and collective mission; it tries to restore trust and understanding within and among communities by promoting education for cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue and understanding, and fighting against misconceptions, stereotypes, prejudices, discrimination, racism and hate speech; it contributes to reinforce human security, peace and development worldwide.

- The UNAOC relies upon its network of member countries and its wide platform of partners to promote intercultural dialogue and cooperation. It is a results-oriented initiative but it only acts as a convener, a catalyst and a broker. It cannot replace implementation of policy measures by governments and other local players, it cannot substitute lawmakers, it cannot act on behalf of civil society organizations.

- In this process, dialogue is the tool par excellence to address and, we hope, resolve the objective and subjective differences that cause tensions and conflict. However one defines it, dialogue is a democratic method aimed at resolving problems through mutual understanding and concessions, rather than through the unilateral imposition of one side's views and interests.

- This is why I am more than happy to be here – to learn about and get a better sense of the outstanding Australian experience in building an inclusive society, in understanding the new challenges you face, in learning about the policies you are implementing.

- I believe that any successful formula has to reconcile diversity and social cohesion, to combine a modern sense of belonging, community and collective mission, based on a dynamic and inclusive definition of culture and identity, social justice and also economic efficiency.

- I also believe that what is at stake are our democratic values – those of freedom, equity, respect for rights and liberties, and tolerance; those of citizenship, justice and inclusiveness.

- Changes over the past few decades are challenging these values. But to a certain extent, it is normal because life is dynamic and each time - and wave of migrants, I would add - has its challenges. Each generation expresses some anxiety about the unfamiliar, the new and the uncertainties brought by change. But fears have to be addressed, myths deconstructed and trust restore with appropriate action.

- Australian multiculturalism as the reality of its cultural and ethnic diversity and as public governance of this diversity is a great achievement. But as it normally happens, it has never been free from tensions, problems and risks and it was not achieved overnight. As a work in progress, multiculturalism needs to move on and become less defensive and more assertive.

- Multiculturalism needs to be reinvigorated – through education, welfare and indeed culture because after all it is through culture in a broad perspective as a way to develop social interaction, trust and understanding that people are bond closer together, thrive and ensure better socio-economic outcomes.

- As the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, I am here to learn with you and to invite Australia to bring to the Alliance’s various platforms of dialogue and cooperation its unique experience and to reflect together on what has changed and on how multiculturalism can be updated and extended into a new progressive model.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Most of the global challenges of our century can be dealt with but by appropriate soft power tools. This applies to the Millennium Development Goals' agenda. This applies to the Millennium Declaration that sets common goals towards peace, security, justice and democratic societies, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, and the promotion in all countries of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all. This applies to climate change, to human security main issues, to democratisation transitions and social transformations in the MENA region. This applies even to almost all protracted conflicts that poison our living together in one world, notably the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- So it is time to invest more in soft power tools. It is time to refocus the international agenda on achieving results that meet people's concerns, that contribute to build a better future for all.
- This is why our annual Forum, which this year takes place in Qatar, on 11-13 December, will focus on the missing link between culture, development and peace. We want to achieve better integration between the Alliance's goals and the development agenda. We hope that the Doha Forum will be a turning point in renewing local, national and global commitment to the Alliance's mission and goals.
- Let me conclude by expressing my hope that Australia will play a leading role in this renewal.

➤ Many thanks.