United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

THE FOURTH FORUM OF THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS
DOHA 2011

DOHA PRE-FORUM 2011

Consultation with civil society organizations
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Connecting the UNAOC's mission and the MDG: an Agenda for
Collaborative Action

Venue: Hotel Oryx Rotana

CONCEPT PAPER

In association with:

1- Background information

1. The Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) was launched in 2005 by the former Secretary-General of the United Nations Kofi Annan, with the co-sponsorship of the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey, Mr. José Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdogan. The UNAOC seeks to forge collective political will and to mobilize concerted action at institutional and civil society levels aimed at improving understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, helping to counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism.

2. Backed by a Group of Friends made up of a growing number of over 120 states, international and regional organizations, this United Nations initiative is based on the recommendations of the Report of the High-Level Group of November 2006 on the Alliance of Civilizations.

3. The main four fields of action of the UNAOC are education, youth, media and migration. As an action driven initiative, the Alliance promotes and/or supports innovative projects in these four areas that aim at developing and implementing a paradigm of mutual respect between civilizations and cultures that contributes to avoid further deterioration of relations between communities and nations, in particular between Muslim and the so-called Western societies, which could threaten international stability, security, peace and development.

4. In this regard, the UNAOC mission is fully aligned with the principles of the Millennium Declaration and complements it by promoting democracy and respect for all internationally recognized human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development.

5. Aiming at strengthening the capacity of all its member countries to implement good governance – or democratic governance – of cultural diversity, it strives for the full protection and promotion of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all, including minority rights; to combat all forms of violence against women; to

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take measures to ensure respect for and protection of the human rights of migrants, migrant workers and their families; to eliminate the increasing acts of racism and xenophobia in many societies and to promote greater harmony and tolerance in all societies – all commitments made in the Millennium Declaration.

6. Because of its specific mission, the UNAOC is underpinned by the importance of both tolerance, as one of the fundamental values that is essential to international relations in the twenty-first century, and respect among human beings in all diversities of belief, culture and language. As one can read in the Millennium Declaration "differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. A culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted". This is all about the Alliance's mission and in this sense it can be seen as the appropriate UN forum to meet this millennium challenge.

7. Furthermore, as the fourth pillar of sustainable development, together with its economic, social and environmental components, cultural diversity is a cross-cutting dimension of the Millennium Development Goals' agenda and is integral to the core principles of the Millennium Declaration.

8. To ensure the sustainability of these four pillars, Her Highness Shaikha Moza stressed in several occasions the need to explore further the linkage between UNAoC mission and objectives, and the MDG agenda and tying them closely together. The Doha forum to be held in December 2011 will be focused on this topical issue and will aim at renewing the political commitment to the Alliance's agenda.

2. 2007-2011-the Alliance on move

9. Four years have elapsed since the High Level Report on the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) began to be implemented with the appointment of the High Representative, President Jorge Sampaio, in May 2007.

10. Over this fairly short period, the UNAOC met a number of pre-conditions so that now it is considered as the UN platform for global intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

11. Its Group of Friends reached a critical membership mass of more than a hundred countries and over twenty international and regional organizations. Its annual Forums became the main UN event at which to address cultural diversity challenges. The UNAOC is now recognised by the international community as a main partner for intercultural dialogue issues. At national and regional level, good progress has been made with National Plans and Regional Strategies for intercultural dialogue and cooperation being designed and implemented. At grass-roots level, countless initiatives worldwide have been organized, supported or stimulated by the Alliance.

12. Still, there is a long way to go for the UNAOC to be able to contribute fully to promoting, encouraging and realizing human rights and fundamental freedoms as the foundation of development, justice and peace in the world.

13. For that, the UNAOC has to consolidate its agenda in terms of goals and targets to be achieved in the fields of education, youth, media and migration in order to be more integrated within the international agenda and attract more committed answers from political leaders, civil society and stakeholders.

14. Underpinned by a strong vision of culture as a tool for development and a process, this means prioritizing a number of priorities for 2011 and beyond, namely: developing strategic efforts to build a clear definition of intercultural dialogue, its goals and targets, including quality criteria and indicators to assess the impact of programmes and activities carried out under National Plans and Regional Strategies; developing a closer relationship with national Focal Points in order to help them design and implement National Plans and develop intercultural policy positions at national, regional and local levels; last but not least, enhancing the role of non-governmental civil society actors within the UNAOC as key driving forces to promote intercultural dialogue and cooperation at grass roots level.

3. **2011: a turning point to be achieved at the Doha Forum**

15. Building upon the existing *acquis*, 2011 aims to shape a turning point for the Alliance culminating in the Doha Forum in December.

16. To achieve this goal, a three steps approach is being developed at the level of:

    a. Shaping a renewed agenda: enhancing the role of culture and cultural diversity in conflict prevention, peace-building, economic development, social cohesion and poverty reduction.
    b. Resources mobilization: setting up a voluntary replenishment mechanism for the Alliance.
    c. Building a new partnership with civil society.

17. The 3rd UNAOC Implementation Plan for 2011-2013 to be submitted by the High Representative in June will elaborate further on these three dimensions. It will present an overview of the priorities ahead, taking stock of the pre-existing work, building further upon achievements and bearing in mind the ongoing changes in world politics and the new demands and challenges that societies are experiencing.

18. By engaging further all members of the Group of Friends of the UNAOC as well as its partners - local authorities and powers, parliamentarians, faith-led organizations, civil society, foundations, corporations, universities, youth -, and by extending and enlarging its networks to other actors and constituencies – such as development agencies and programmers, MDGs advocates – the Doha Forum in December will culminate an intense process of preparation and consultations leading to a renewed commitment to action.

19. "Breaking with Business as usual", a stimulating motto picked up from a paper presented by civil society in the Commonwealth, should be the leading inspiration for the preparation process of the Doha Forum.

20. The two key milestones of this process are the Pre-Forum with civil society organizations, in May, and the Replenishment Session of the Trust Fund of the Alliance, to be held in Turkey, in October. Both seek different but complementary aims that altogether will provide the UNAOC with a reinvigorated legitimacy and sustainability.

5. The Pre-Forum (Doha, 3-4 May 2011)

21. The Doha Pre-Forum, to be held on 3rd and 4th May 2011, is a milestone in the process leading to this turning point since the Alliance is holding consultations with civil society organizations for the very first time.

22. This Pre-Forum is intended to be part of the preparation process of the 4th Global Forum of the Alliance, which will take place in Doha, on 11-13 December 2011. The agenda, announcements and outcomes of the Doha Forum will take in due consideration the views and recommendations of the Civil Society Organizations (CSOs). Furthermore the High Representative will also build upon them to prepare the 3rd Implementation Plan of the Alliance (2011-2013) to be submitted in June.

23. Therefore, the main objectives of the UNAOC Pre-Forum are the following:

    a. To update the CSO representatives on the mission, ongoing activities and future projects of the UNAOC and open up new avenues for further engagement of CSOs.
    b. To reflect together on how to reinforce the role of the UNAOC as a tool aimed at promoting, encouraging and realizing human rights and

fundamental freedoms as the foundation of development, justice and peace in the world.

   c. To reflect together on how to address the main challenges, risks and opportunities posed by cultural diversity and intercultural understanding as key dimensions of peace and development, with a special focus on the ongoing changes in some Arab societies.

   d. To explore new and innovative ways of interaction and collaboration among CSOs by providing a platform for sustainable exchanges with a view to making the Doha Forum an opportunity to announce new initiatives engaging CSOs.

   e. To increase public understanding and awareness and citizens' involvement in addressing cultural diversity and intercultural understanding.

24. In part 6 below seven suggestions of topics to be discussed at the various working sessions of the Pre-Forum. They are aimed at challenging the participants to come up with fresh ideas on these issues based on their experience and know-how. Further to additional ideas that might be put forward, comments and questions, the critical point to be discussed is how best to operationalize this agenda, how to engage and commit all stakeholders and constituencies to action in order to bring change on the ground.

25. Questions to be raised are namely: how best can I as a participant in this Pre-Forum engage with the UNAOC? What am I prepared to do? What do I expect the UNAOC to provide me as well the civil society as a future UNAOC constituency with? What kind of tools can help empower this constituency? How best will the Doha Forum in December break with business as usual and make a difference? Let us hope that the May Pre-Forum with civil society organizations will help to clarify these points and devise a framework for a new alliance.

6. Elements for a renewed UNAOC agenda: preliminary reflections

26. The High Level Report on the Alliance of Civilizations (2006) in spite of recognizing in its first introductory paragraph that "our world is alarmingly out of balance", marked by "great inequalities and paradoxes" and where "for most of humanity, freedom from want and freedom from fear appear as elusive as ever", goes no further into the relationship between culture, cultural diversity and development.

27. Nor does it focus on the Millennium Declaration, endorsed in 2000 by all members of the United Nations, which as a strategy paper for the new millennium would have offered a sound basis to elaborate on that connection and provide the UNAOC initiative with additional strength, more outreach and extra visibility.

28. Exploring this missing link is the challenge ahead to reinvigorate the Alliance's initiative, contribute to a better integration of its agenda into the global priorities, attract more interest, ground it at local level, and generate a stronger commitment to action from all stakeholders - political leaders, faith communities, civil society organizations, private sector and individuals.

29. In this regard two basic assumptions are needed: number one, we need a broad definition of culture, including in it artistic expressions in the form of literature, music, film, dance, etc., but also the sum of social practices and mental structures or worldviews, in the form of religion, education, language, social and family practices, namely gender role patterns and the management of natural resources; number two, development is also to be understood in a broad perspective as "freedom" or "people's ability to achieve what they value", following Professor Amartya Sen's vision. In other words, development should include not only poverty reduction and economic growth, but also strengthening other values such as social justice, equal opportunities, social

cohesion and sustainability as well as identity and dignity of all individuals. In this sense, development as freedom remains basically an unfinished process that embraces both the so-called developing and the developed countries.

30. The key question is not whether culture matters, but how to integrate cultural dimensions into development strategies, be it at local, national or international level. The question is: how should the UNAOC proceed to work with partners, countries, local communities and a wide array of stakeholders to make the best of cultural resources in order to: explore new economic opportunities for communities such as income and employment; strengthen social capital and social cohesion; build dynamic, knowledge-based societies; address tensions and conflicts that fuel violence and disrupt security and peace; foster a culture of freedoms, human dignity, tolerance and peace in order to ensure quality of life for all.

31. On the basis of these broad views on culture and development, possible ways that can be explored in order to better incorporate the cultural dimension as an integral component of development are the following:

32. Suggestion nº 1 – The cultural dimension as an important component of poverty reduction, in particular as expressed by the MDGs strategy[1].

33. Paying serious attention to culture is essential to improve development effectiveness – in education, health, the production of goods and services, the management of cities. It is at the very heart of poverty reduction as well as the quality of life. Development solutions are more effective if they build upon people's distinctive identities and on their strengths. The self-awareness and pride that come from cultural identity are an essential ingredient if communities are to take charge of their own lives and choices. However we also know that cultures can have adverse elements – those that oppress and degrade. So the challenge is to draw on traditions, values, knowledge and

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[1] This paragraph is inspired by Culture and Sustainable Development, World Bank, 1999

strengths that reinforce the social fabric and build development solutions that resonate with a community's sense of who it is.

34. One possible concrete way to move forward in this regard would be to focus on the MDGs Strategy and devise specific ways to foster its implementation by twinning it with a cross-cultural approach. Furthermore, this would mean using the MDGs as a paradigm for the UNAOC in order to draw a charter of potential "Millennium Dialogue Challenges" combined with a road map for their implementation. This twofold approach is likely to create a perfect complementary and mutually reinforced effect pressing countries and stakeholders to commit to action.

35. Suggestion nº 2 - Culture as an active instrument in strengthening the very poor[2]

    This approach can be summarized as follows: "Cultural projects can in general be used as an active instrument in promoting understanding for such values as social justice, equality of opportunity and sustainability and to promote the identity and dignity of poor people and of hard-pressed population groups. These groups stand in need of higher status and respect in society in order to improve their opportunities of influencing and benefiting from development in society. As part of this process special attention must be devoted to the situation of women and indigenous people".

36. Suggestion nº 3 – Culture as a major factor influencing how governance and human rights are conceptualized and put into practice[3] .

    What is at stake can be formulated as follows: "Culture, governance and human rights are inter-dependent. Literature, music, the arts as well as various forms

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[2] This paragraph is inspired by Culture and Development, Strategy and guidelines, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, DANIDA.

[3] This paragraph is inspired by Karim Karin and Sarah Wayland, Culture, Governance and Human Rights in Recognizing Culture – a series of briefing papers on culture and development, 2001.

of media are being used to promote good governance and human rights. Many forms of cultural expression are dependent on national or municipal structures not only for funding but also for supportive modes of governance. The practice of the cultures of minority groups in a particular country is influenced by specific conceptions of human rights, such as the place of the individual and groups within society.

The idea of cultural citizenship transcends the notion of citizenship as a collection of rights and obligations that give individuals a formal legal identity within a nation-state. It ensures the rights of members of diverse cultural backgrounds to participate in a given polity. Thus, cultural citizenship entails both claiming political rights and building community.

The notion of cultural rights is integral to the idea of a person's identification with a community and in many cases several communities simultaneously. Some have argued that the natural destination of the very notion of citizen should be a world citizenship. Persons are acting within an increasingly globalised world, one in which many nation-states are relinquishing political and economic sovereignty to supranational organisations. Nevertheless, the nation-state will continue to be both an important base from which citizens act as well as a primary polity with which mobilised groups interact.

A democratic setting enables the participation in society by members of diverse backgrounds. This 'cultural democracy' values cultural pluralism, fair and equitable socio-political access, and active participation by all individuals and groups. It is a form of democratic renewal, causing governments to open up to the ensemble of social actors, to develop new forms of partnership, to break with centralism, and to take into account the various possible levels of decision-making involving citizen participation."

37. Suggestion nº 4 – Promotion of cultural diversity to foster tolerance, prevent conflicts and foster peace-building

Cultural diversity is a source of creativity but also of violence and exclusion. Mutual appreciation of diversity among cultures creates positive and

constructive engagement. Tolerance and respect for human rights and for different cultures and religions as well as a common sense of belonging must be promoted in order to prevent tensions and conflicts as well as to consolidate peace-building in post-conflict situations. Because of the increasingly assorted make up of our societies, and the need to reconcile diversity and social cohesion, the innovative notion of "cohesive diversity" might be enlightening and deserves further analysis.

38. Suggestion nº 5 – How to engage with faith for delivering development and peace that enhances the lives of its citizens?[4]

"The role of faith communities in social cohesion and conflict, and in democracy, governance, gender equality and sustainable development, has increasingly dominated the debate about diversity in the last few years".

In this regard, the questions to be raised are namely: how can the role of faith-based and interfaith civil society organizations be enhanced and supported to promote appreciation of diversity and on the broad canvas of national development, gender relations and interfaith dialogue? How to explore initiatives that can help understand what faith is, its subtleties, the relationship between the religious and the secular and the interplay between different identities, particularly amongst young people who form the majority of the world population?

39. Suggestion nº 6 – The role of new media in mobilization and social transformation

Communication is a fundamental tool in social change. Mass media play an important role in shaping our perceptions of the "other", in making various worldviews available, and in validating the idea that diversity is a common

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[4] This paragraph is inspired on Engaging with Faith – Report of the Commonwealth Foundation project on improving understanding and cooperation between different faith communities, 2005-2007.

feature of human societies.

The global broadcast communication changed the way in which we looked upon the "other", because we were finally able, on a global scale, to see "ourselves" through the eyes of the "other". With satellite television we all became someone else's "other". In doing so, we have grown as individuals and as societies, because we have reached a point where the "other" is no longer just a product of our imagination, but a "real image" that can no longer be ignored in our thoughts. It's true that we can always choose to hate the "other", but it's increasingly difficult to do so, when the other "enters" our living room through our television screens –particularly if the broadcasts reach us through the values of free speech.

Furthermore, over the last few months we have witnessed social change in many areas of the world, but nowhere else has it had such an impact in our perceptions of the world and the "other" as in the case of the so-called "Arab Spring". Some have called such mobilizations "Twitter" or "Facebook" revolutions, but in doing so they have in many ways forgotten that before social media there is social trust and before the latter comes valuing communication with the "others".

Social media add new social functions to the role of the media in our societies and we need to explore further these new opportunities. It has created a community of belonging and opened up the possibility both of building one's autonomy and of acting together to achieve common goals.

Now the question is whether the very same people who have stood and are able to stand against what they don't agree with, will also be able to join efforts in building new political institutions. Institutions that, probably, will be more flexible than the previous ones. But these institutions have also to be the main pillars of trust and to become trustees of the political aspirations of societies towards a better future.

Other questions are: how can these new tools be used to reinforce fundamental values such as equality, freedoms, pluralism, inclusion and tolerance ? How can they best be used as tools for inclusive dialogue, reconciliation and development?

40. Suggestion nº 7 – Confronting clashes of cultures through enhanced dialogue and cooperation across cultural boundaries

Because of ever-greater economic, political, social and environmental interdependency among the countries of the world as well as ever-closer contact between peoples through new information and communications technologies, namely social networks, cultural diversity has become an issue in world politics for good and bad reasons. For good reasons as far as it gives rise to additional exchanges, dialogues and cross-fertilization among cultures enhancing cross-cultural understanding, mutual respect and tolerance. For bad reasons because globalization also places pressure on local cultures, identities and patterns of life, triggers exclusion, marginalization and discrimination and feeds tensions between different cultural groups within and among countries.