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ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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High-Level Roundtable

“The Inter-ethnic City – management and policies for a Better Integration of Migrants”

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Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I should like to greet this initiative jointly promoted by the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the Permanent Missions of Italy and Canada to the United Nations and the Alliance of Civilizations.

I very much regret that I cannot be with you but, as you may know, having general elections in my country on the 27th of September it was impossible for me to be back in New York in time for this roundtable.

However I didn't want to miss this outstanding opportunity to share with you some thoughts on the topical issue of integration of migrants in cities.

As a former Mayor of Lisbon, I know what I am talking about. Cities are where people from a diversity of cultures mix together and where people from a diversity of nations and backgrounds come together and have to live together.

If you think that the majority of the world's population lives in cities, - in 2008, about 3.3 billion people lived in cities and towns, and this number is estimated to reach 4.9 billion (*60 percent of the global population*) in 2030 – we easily realize the huge dimension of the challenges ahead.

So, since globalization and migration bring together cultural communities in urban areas who may previously not have had much interaction with each other, cultural diversity has become one of the main features of our cities.

This is why we witness nowadays the rise of social and community tensions. Interaction of different groups with different traditions and different cultures and beliefs can be a source of friction and often of conflict.

Therefore, a government's relative inability to manage such a cultural diversity will make these cities potential breeding grounds for unrest, conflicts and violence, with the risk of spreading regionally, nationally, and internationally.

This is one of the main reasons why the Alliance of Civilizations is trying to promote "good governance of cultural diversity" and has put it at the core of its mission in its four main fields of action, i.e. youth, education, media and migration.

Good governance of cultural diversity is central not only to achieving social cohesion within societies but also in terms of conflict prevention between societies.

In my view, cultural diversity can spark innovation, stimulate creativity and boost the economy. But we cannot take it for granted and to make it an element of progress and not a factor of conflicts and polarization, we need policies and common action aimed at the successful integration of migrant populations. This is my first point.

In this regard, municipal and local governments play a crucial role in promoting sustainable urban development based on cultural diversity, as a key factor in preventing conflicts and contributing to security and peace.

In my view, promoting an appropriate "climate" for cultural diversity is a key role for local governments. And this is my second point.

Legitimacy, proximity to citizens and experience in local management make local authorities more attuned to success in fostering mutual understanding, confidence and respect among peoples of different cultural and religious traditions.

In this regard I also want to stress that city diplomacy or city-to-city cooperation is a powerful complement to traditional diplomacy between States. City diplomacy can play a significant role in peace building and conflict prevention. This is my third point.

In my view, the AoC can act as a catalyst in promoting initiatives of city-to-city diplomacy, aimed at helping a number of local and municipal authorities to lay down conditions for sustainable peace between divided communities and societies.

As a catalyst and a platform for interaction of different players and stakeholders, the Alliance aims to build on existing initiatives and work in close collaboration with the main relevant players.

We are very keen on facilitating exchange and bridge-building between actors of integration so as to promote further involvement and replication of good practices.

And we are ready to disseminate positive experiences of integration of migrants so as to counter polarizing stereotypes about migrants.

This is why we promoted the organization of this roundtable that builds on recent work done by foundations, experts, Group of Friends and Focal Points, and follows the Alliance's Istanbul Forum sessions on integration of migrants, particularly at the urban level.

Moreover we plan to launch, at the beginning of 2010, an online clearinghouse on Migration and Integration.

It will be a virtual platform for learning and exchange. It will showcase good practices gathered, initiated and implemented by a variety of players, from the private sector and academic institutions to national and local governments, including civil society, international organizations and UN agencies.

In addition, we would like to promote a thematic network for exchange and promotion of good practices at local level so as to help in the creation of cities of inclusion and participation.

Last but not least, in the field of city diplomacy activities, I am pleased to announce that we will also launch by the end of this year a Call for Interest for Cities around the world, inviting them to submit a proposal to host a Dialogue café.

As you may remember, the Dialogue Café Network is a new AoC project launched in Istanbul, aimed at bridging cultural and social misunderstanding and at promoting diverse, multicultural innovative conversations and interaction.

Cities are at the core of this project, cities with the right mix of creativity, diversity, intercultural profile, innovation, collaboration, culture of peace and vision.

So please keep an eye on our website.

Dear Friends,

I am sure that this roundtable will contribute to taking stock of the existing initiatives on integration of migrants and open up the way to bridging the gaps and exploring possible additional actions that bring added value in this field of city diplomacy and city-to-city cooperation.

Thanks for your support and participation.

I look forward to learning the outcomes of your debates

Many thanks