

September 25th 2012

**Declaration of Alumni of the
United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Fellowship Programme
To Heads of States and Governments
At the occasion of the 67th General Assembly
Of the United Nations**

Your Excellencies, Heads of States and Governments,

At the occasion of the 67th General Assembly of the United Nations, which is being held in troubled times of renewed violence and manifestations of anger between Western, Middle-East and North African countries, we thought it is our responsibility to share a message as Alumni of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) Fellowship Programme.

We believe that the General Assembly of the United Nations, comprising all 193 Members States, provides a unique and crucial forum for multilateral discussions. For a life in freedom, dignity and security, we urge all participants in this 67th session to exert their responsible leadership and make the dialogue of civilizations an absolute priority. The effort to bridge the cultural divide needs to be redoubled, promoting mutual understanding, trust and respect among and within societies at all levels.

We respect the right of freedom of expression, and are hopeful that all those availing themselves of that right do so in a responsible manner. We believe that any form of provocation can make misunderstanding bigger and feed the spiral of violence.

Quoting a recent interview of Jorge Sampaio, UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations and former President of the Portuguese Republic, we believe *“it’s important to recognize that one person’s contemptible actions do not necessarily represent an entire nation, or everyone in a particular group or of a certain faith”*. The overwhelming majority must occupy its rightful place in the dialogue, and not leave it to extremists.

Our group, as well as other networks of cultural ambassadors and global citizens, is most willing to mobilize positive energies and bring our determined contribution to develop diplomatic capital and cross cultural civic engagement.

We took the initiative of this Declaration as members of an emerging international community, composed of 200 young leaders from more than 30 countries. Active in the fields of business, media, government and civil society, we all share the founding and lifetime experience of the UNAOC Fellowship Programme, aiming to enhance mutual knowledge and understanding between peoples and societies from Europe, North America and Muslim-majority countries in the Arab World.

Thanks to this experience, we were given a unique opportunity to discuss long-term solutions for increased collaboration and friendship between the Western and the Arab world, going far beyond negative stereotypes, learning from each other and leveraging the many values we have in common.

We believe in the extraordinary power of dialogue to change perceptions and avoid outdated radicalism and sensationalism. By taking part to the UNAOC Fellowship Programme, we accepted the challenge to apply lessons learned to both our personal and professional lives, in an effort to contribute as humble but committed agents of change.

We believe that the Alliance of Civilizations is a timely, rightful and vital UN initiative aimed at improving understanding between the Western world and the Muslim world. Together with such like-minded organizations and programmes promoting intercultural dialogue, it should urgently be given all appropriate means to reach more people, especially young professionals, to raise awareness and reinforce individual and collective capacities to build *one humanity* out of our diverse cultures.

As we draft this declaration, two new groups of UNAOC Fellows, one from the Arab world and one from the Western world, are getting ready for a two-week discovery trip to Morocco, Egypt, United Arab Emirates, USA, Germany, Belgium and France. During this time, they will meet with policy makers, media leaders, local communities, grassroots organizations, and religious representatives to better understand how each of those societies embraces change. It is our hope that many more Fellows will continue the conversation through similar experiences in the years to come.

Cultural diversity is our world's most meaningful and precious asset. Let's join our voices and efforts to foster pluralism and address in an appropriate way the alarming rise of all kinds of extremism.

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For more information about the UNAOC Fellowship Programme, please visit:
<http://www.unaoc.org/actions/trainings-and-exchanges/fellowship/>

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