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ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Jorge Sampaio

UN HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR
THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

3rd Focal Points meeting
Opening remarks

Rabat, ISESCO,
10 November 2009

Mme Latifa Akharbach, Secrétaire d'Etat auprès du ministre des Affaires étrangères et de la Coopération du Maroc,

M. Abdulhaziz Othman Altwaijri, Directeur général de l' ISESCO,

Excellences,

Chers Points Focaux de l'Alliance,

Mesdames et Messieurs,

- Permettez-moi, tout d'abord, de saluer très chaleureusement Mme la représentante du Gouvernement Marocain et de la remercier d'être aujourd'hui parmi nous.

- Qu'il me soit permis de vous demander, chère Madame, de bien vouloir transmettre à sa Majesté le Roi Mohamed VI l'expression de mes respects.

- Ensuite, je tiens à remercier notre hôte, l'ISESCO, en la personne de son Directeur général, M. Abdulhaziz Othman Altwaijri, pour la généreuse hospitalité qui nous a été réservée : nous sommes très touchés, mais pas vraiment surpris, car nous savons tous combien la culture des pays que votre organisation représente est imprégnée des principes et des valeurs de la civilité et de l'affabilité, dont la qualité de votre accueil témoigne si bien.

- Par ailleurs, M. Altawajri, ce lieu de rencontre que vous avez voulu nous offrir est, à mon sens, plus qu'un relais car j'y vois les prémices d'un nouveau cycle de coopération entre l'ISESCO et l'Alliance qui permettra que des échanges durables puissent se développer à l'avenir.

- Puis, je veux saluer très chaleureusement tous les Points Focaux du Groupe d'Amis de l'Alliance des civilisations et les remercier vivement d'avoir fait le déplacement pour participer à notre 3^{ème} rencontre. Je sais que, pour certains d'entre vous, cela a représenté de longues heures de voyage. Je vous suis gré de votre engagement envers l'Alliance et j'espère que demain, lors de votre retour, vous pourrez vous dire, à l'occasion du bilan mental que nous faisons tous dès que nous nous laissons choir dans notre siège à bord – « cela a été fatigant, mais ça a valu la peine! ».

- Enfin, je veux saluer tous ceux qui, basés à Rabat, sont venus assister à cette séance d'ouverture des travaux de l'Alliance des Civilisations. J'imagine que vous n'êtes pas nécessairement très familiers de cette initiative des Nations unies, malheureusement il ne me sera pas possible de vous mettre au fait en quelques mots, mais laissez-moi vous convier à visiter notre site www.unaoc.org pour les détails

- En guise d'introduction, je me contenterai de rappeler que l'Alliance est une initiative des Nations unies lancée par l'Espagne et par la Turquie, mais qui regroupe aujourd'hui plus d'une centaine de membres – entre pays et organisations internationales.

- L'Alliance reflète la volonté de la grande majorité des peuples de rejeter l'extrémisme dans toutes les sociétés et de soutenir le respect pour la diversité, qu'elle soit ethnique, culturelle ou religieuse.

- Sa vocation première est de s'attaquer aux divisions croissantes entre les sociétés, particulièrement celles qui opposent le soi-disant « Islam » et le soi-disant « Occident », en réaffirmant un paradigme de respect mutuel entre des peuples et des communautés de cultures et religions différentes et en incitant à mobiliser une action concertée tendant vers ce but.

- “Comment vivre ensemble entre peuples et communautés différents, en respectant l'autre dans sa différence ?”, telle est donc la question à laquelle l'Alliance vise à apporter des réponses.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends

- We are approaching 2010. For all of us, it will be the international year for the rapprochement of cultures. That comes just at the right moment to give an extra impetus to the advancement of the Alliance's goals.

- Let us use this opportunity to move forward with the tools we have to help the rapprochement of cultures. Let us be ambitious and aim not only at getting cultures closer, but seeking mutual exchanges, cross-fertilization of cultures, religions, sciences, arts, concepts and various ways of thinking. Let us contribute to the development of innovative tools for intercultural dialogue and to foster intercultural competencies and skills.

- This is why in July we suggested that UNESCO should use the 3rd Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, which will be held in Rio from 28 to 29 May 2010, to showcase its "acquis" in terms of intercultural dialogue, to support the organization of a musical side event reflecting the power of music to bridge divides and to create a special rapprochement of cultures Award for civil society projects.

- In this regard, let me also add that the recently released UNESCO world report named “Investing in Cultural Diversity and Intercultural Dialogue” is a very useful complementary road map both for the activities to be carried out in 2010 to meet the objectives of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures but also to achieve the Alliance’s goals.

- I must say that I am more than happy to realize that the Alliance has already anticipated the implementation of some of the recommendations of this Report, namely through its proposed National Plans and Regional Strategies which seem the right tools to address the challenges posed by cultural diversity in our globalizing time.

- So I am really keen on working closely with UNESCO to scale up our efforts in order to reinforce and speed up the implementation of the recommendations of its World Report on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in the framework of the Alliance.

Dear Friends

- I don't like to repeat myself and I think that it is always a bit presumptuous or even a bad signal of ageing when one quotes oneself... however, I am strongly tempted to repeat here what I said in New York at our last Ministerial meeting last 26 September.
- But, well, I assume that you can pick up my notes from the AoC website, so let me rather try to add on and share some additional thoughts with you on National Plans and Regional Strategies...
- Why do I insist on investing in these key strategic tools?
- For three main reasons: it is the only way to de-globalize the Alliance and develop its local footing, be it at the national, regional or grass roots level – first reason.
- Second reason: because diversity – be it cultural, ethnic, religious or linguistic – in spite of its global dimension is always a local affair and its management depends mainly on local policy and decision makers and players.

- Third reason: because to promote public policies related to “good governance of cultural diversity” as I like to say - but you may prefer saying “democratic governance” – , we need to rely upon national action and regional cooperation involving a wide array of players – governments, cities, civil society (NGOs, foundations, faith-based organizations etc), private sector as well as international and regional organizations.

- In my view, in our globalizing world and mixed societies, good governance of cultural diversity has become a key issue to foster a culture of peace, prevent conflicts within and between societies, build social cohesion and inclusive societies, and contribute to peace-building in post-conflict situations. Furthermore to preserve cultural diversity as the fourth pillar of sustainable development we need to invest in a new paradigm for intercultural dialogue.

- So, in my view, National Plans and Regional Strategies for Intercultural Dialogue represent, first and foremost, good opportunities to **map roads** for intercultural dialogue processes to take place. It allows to identify exclusion or discriminatory practices as well as existing stumbling blocks or shortcomings and to develop plans to improve the situation.

- This is first step approach of a long term process aimed at developing a new paradigm or strategy for intercultural dialogue.
- Following experts' recommendations, the three other steps are:
- **Breaking down walls:** i.e. removing barriers to equality and fight against prejudice, racism and stereotypes and introducing incentives and measures to increase cultural pluralism;
- **Building bridges:** i.e. developing intercultural skills and competences through for instance educational, artistic and media programs which could equip individuals with the necessary tools to fully and successfully engage in Intercultural dialogue processes;
- **Sharing spaces,** meaning by that creating spaces where ideas, experiences and beliefs can be respectfully exchanged and where interactive communication can freely flow.

Dear Focal Points

- National Plans that I asked countries to present are by no means a new bureaucratic requirement nor an imposition for countries nor a hidden attempt to interfere in domestic affairs.

- National Plans are an invitation to countries to generate an internal process of ownership of the Alliance of Civilizations' goals and aims. They are intended to create concrete opportunities for countries to exchange experiences and lessons learned regarding the common challenge they face in dealing with increasing cultural diversity, new cohesion and identity problems within their own societies and among them. National Plans aim at helping countries to cope with this challenge and generate a new awareness at all levels of the society.

- Let me also stress once again that in the face of the diversity of national circumstances, such Plans cannot be devised according to a single model.

- But does this mean that all you have to do is list the number of programmes or initiatives in progress, and that is that? Does this mean that we cannot aim at having in each Plan a core of common activities? Does this mean that we cannot in the long run make some recommendations with a view to ensuring improved governance of cultural diversity?

- In my view, mapping roads or listing existing practices, actions and players involved in intercultural dialogue at the national level to get a comprehensive overview of what is going on is indeed a good kick-off.

- But this is a long-term, gradual process. And I would like the Alliance to contribute to stimulate countries to go ahead and to help open the way to new and creative opportunities towards a new paradigm or strategy for intercultural dialogue.

Dear Friends

- If you want concrete examples of the way forward, let me challenge you and suggest that you start or complement your National Plans, by implementing the following actions:
 - create a National AoC website with the basic AoC papers translated into your national language(s);
 - strongly commit to one of the AoC projects by giving it a national footing – for instance, you can commit to the Youth Solidarity Fund and replicate it at the national level; you can commit to the Rapid Response Media Mechanism and provide it with an array of names to feed the Global experts finder or organize a seminar on the RRMM for your media people; you can commit to “Dialogue Café network” by including in it one or two cities of your country; you can organize a session with the private sector in order to enlarge to your companies the AoC business coalition; you can commit to expand to your foundations and universities our specific networks...

- organize a national AoC event focused on youth, on education, on migration or/and media, according to your national interests to raise public awareness and boost civil society initiatives.
 - create a National AoC Award to promote awareness about the benefits of intercultural dialogue
- These are just a few examples, but I could go on with so many others... The reason why I asked the secretariat to make brief presentations of the AoC ongoing activities is precisely to give you an overview of the kind of actions that you could implement in your countries as part of the National Plans.
- I hope we will go home full of fresh and stimulating ideas...

Dear Friends

- Let me now very briefly turn to Regional Strategies.
- Although I will address this issue in the afternoon session, let me just underline here that I see Regional Strategies as an indispensable complement to National Plans or, if the latter don't pre-exist, as a stimulus to them. Moreover, they represent an attempt to develop trans-national activities within a broader comprehensive and integrated framework.
- The Alliance's Regional Strategies favour the interchange of experiences and cooperation on how to address problems and challenges shared by a group of countries, develop common approaches and implement common actions to increase their collective impact.
- The experience, the knowledge and good practices generated within National Plans are expected to be applicable to other countries in the region as well. This is why an important element of the Regional Strategies would be knowledge codification and knowledge sharing.

- So covering the four main areas of the Alliance, Regional Strategies should build on the ongoing AoC programmes, the activities included in the relevant National Plans as well as on any other initiatives and projects developed by other international organizations and by non-state actors in the field of intercultural dialogue.

- For the time being we are working hard to develop a Regional Strategy for South East Europe which will be adopted in a Conference to be held in Sarajevo on the 14th December.

- Moreover, I have started some political consultations with regard to the AoC Regional Strategy for the Euro-Mediterranean area which is closely related to the joint initiative launched in Istanbul with the Anna Lindh Foundation named Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges. Our aim is to present it at a Conference to be hosted in spring 2010 by President Mubarak.

- Concerning the Latin-American Regional Strategy, I have started some pre-consultations namely with Mr. Enrique Iglesias, Secretary General of SEGIB. However, I don't think it is realistic to expect real progress in this regard before the Forum in Rio.

- Now let me seize this opportunity to encourage our Friends who are here representing Ethiopia and Tanzania to help us to mobilize other African countries to become members of the Alliance and develop a regional initiative!

- I want also to call upon Focal Points and representatives from the Gulf Region to develop their own Regional Strategy with a view to showcasing it at the Doha Forum, to be held in 2011!

- And to the representatives of Indonesia and Korea, present here today, I want to stress that our Austrian colleagues plan to focus on relations with Asia in the context of the 5th Forum of the Alliance that they will host in Vienna in 2012. So please start thinking of this unique opportunity to develop close ties among the various members of the Alliance!

- Last but not least I think that Canada has a lot to share with us because of its longstanding experience in managing cultural diversity. So I think of Canada as a helpful “bridge-builder”, most welcome in any of our regional exercises.

- Before ending, let me just add that to be successful these Regional Strategies have to meet five requirements: ownership of the exercise by the group of countries involved; full commitment and support by the relevant regional and international organizations; engagement of civil society organizations; acknowledgement of previous achievements on intercultural dialogue; and development of an Action Plan building on the regional “acquis”.

Chers Points Focaux,

- Voilà un aperçu des tâches que nous avons devant nous et des défis que nous avons à relever.
- Je suis vraiment persuadé que pour réussir nous devons mettre en commun nos ressources et travailler ensemble.
- Pour le Forum à Rio, j’aimerais pouvoir compter sur votre engagement à faire avancer l’Alliance dans le cadre des Plans Nationaux et des stratégies régionales.

- J'aimerais pouvoir y annoncer que tous les membres de l'Alliance ont engagé au moins une activité en rapport avec les objectifs de l'Alliance dans leurs pays ou, pour les organisations régionales et internationales, qu'elles participent ou soutiennent un projet de l'Alliance.

Excellences,

Chers Amis,

- En tant que «passeur», l'Alliance ne vise qu'à favoriser les échanges et à créer des liens de solidarité accrus devant l'urgence de l'obligation de produire des résultats dans le domaine de la diversité culturelle et du dialogue interculturel.
- Sa force est sa détermination d'agir de concert avec tous les acteurs du changement.
- A cet égard, vous, les points focaux vous jouez un rôle essentiel car sans vous il n'y a pas de connexion possible entre les objectifs globaux de l'Alliance et leur mise en œuvre locale.
- C'est pour cela que cette rencontre est importante. Merci d'être là, merci d'être venus. Au travail donc !

Je vous remercie.