Working document on review of National Plans and Strategies
(revised version)

New York, November 10, 2009

> *(…) Let us assume that [drafting National Strategies] is a long-term, gradual exercise to be carried out by countries at different paces, using different roads. Some countries are more advanced than others. They may want to go faster and build common roads. Other countries will take more time to be convinced of the need to manage the path of intercultural dialogue. By putting forward the suggestion of National Plans and Regional Strategies I do not intend to impose anything on anybody. But I would like the Alliance to help countries open the way to new and creative opportunities towards a common paradigm or strategy for intercultural dialogue. I would like the Alliance to contribute to stimulate countries to go ahead and generate a process that will eventually involve all of its members.*
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> *UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations,*
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> *H.E. Mr. Jorge Sampaio*
>
> *Group of Friends Ministerial meeting, 26 September 2009*

I. Introduction

The Strategic Partnerships team of the AoC Secretariat carried out a review process of the AoC Group of Friends' existing National Strategies and National Plans (NS/NP) in summer-autumn 2009. The work consisted of a review of the existing NS/NP[1], complemented by additional inputs from the Focal Points of a number of countries[2].

Among the criteria used to conduct this comparative study you will find: duration of the NS/NP, ownership of the NS/NP, position of the Focal Point, partnerships at the national level and mechanisms of implementation, coordination and follow-up, and activities implemented in the four priority areas of the AoC.

Phone conferences and meetings focused on such issues as a process of elaboration of the NS/NP (including inclusiveness, participation and stakeholders' involvement); challenges in terms of implementation, follow-up and evaluation; scope for expansion (at regional and/or local level) and possible improvement of the AoC secretariat's support.

This document presents a first set of findings and recommendations that will likely evolve as existing NS/NP are implemented and new NS/NP are adopted.

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[1] *18 countries have sent their National Strategies and Plans, of which 6 from Eastern Europe/Russia, 4 from Western Europe, 4 from the Muslim majority countries, 2 from Latin America and 1 from Oceania (Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Bulgaria, Brazil, Czech Republic, Denmark, Kuwait, Montenegro, New Zealand, Portugal, Qatar, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovenia, Spain, Turkey, The United Kingdom).*
[2] *Phone conferences or meetings were held with Focal Points and their teams from Argentina, Brazil, Russia, New Zealand, Slovenia, Spain and the United Kingdom. Bulgaria sent a written note. Both the synoptic summary of NS/NP and short reports of the phone conferences are available.*

II. General comments: facts and findings

The NS/NP are complete documents and provide a useful overview of countries' understanding and commitment to the AoC's mission. Most NS/NP are an effort to map out and highlight pre-existing initiatives, rather than plans to launch new initiatives. The added value of the exercise is found in the process of collecting, coordinating and following-up on the initiatives; in learning about specific challenges in terms of comprehensiveness, inclusiveness and participation, and in building up of a wide national ownership.

• The process of writing NS/NP is generally very productive and interesting, in particular, in the identification of necessary partners within countries and articulation of projects within a framework of the AoC's objectives;
• For some countries, development of a NS/NP has generated a greater public awareness, debate, media attention, and support.

The **organizational structures** supporting a NS/NP vary from country to country. The ownership of a NS/NP most often rests with Ministries of Foreign Affairs, but also with Offices of Heads of Government. In certain countries, it is also shared with other Ministries, including Ministries of Education, Science, Culture, Media, Interior Affairs, Justice, and Institutions for Equality and for Human, Minority/Migrant Rights, and those promoting diversity.

Some NS/NP's <u>drafting processes</u> have included consultations with NGO, civil society, religious leaders' advisory councils and inter-departmental working groups. Several governments are also coordinating their work with international organizations. More generally, <u>the implementation</u> is managed mainly by various ministries; its process includes a wide range of stakeholders, such as NGO, academic institutions, local authorities, private sector, UN, regional agencies, and religious institutions.

Several Focal Points have stated a need to differentiate between the AoC-run projects, GoF's international projects, national initiatives, and general communications work of the AoC. The role of individual Focal Points varies in terms of coordination and follow-up (depending on the level of active involvement).

Implementation and follow-up
Broadly speaking, all Focal Points state that coordination with ministries and other implementing partners is good. There is still some room for improvement with regard to the ownership of NS/NP. Some Focal Points regret that the national implementing partners do not always recognize themselves as contributors and owners of their NS/NP. Focal Points regularly engage in efforts to assist national partners develop more ownership of the NS/NP, and go beyond a simple provision of information on what they do.

While partners are always eager to see their actions gain visibility and provide an example for others, accessing information, obtaining regular updates and following-up on the progress of national partners remains a challenge for many Focal Points. These tasks are therefore very time-consuming.

A few countries started to provide the AoC Secretariat with their regular updates on the implementation and on recent successes. This has proved immensely useful.

National level - AoC priority areas (Youth-Education-Media-Migration)
In terms of the contents of actions described, the Programs under the four priority areas are generally well articulated, highly field-oriented, and outcomes-generating. A majority of initiatives, which are enlisted under the priority areas, has a potential for connection with both AoC Secretariat-led projects, as well as other GoF's national initiatives.

In case of most NS/NP, coordination with a civil society has only commenced in the second phase of NS/NP's implementation, or has strongly increased in the second phase.

Most often, the first phase of NS/NP focuses more on a governmental/ministerial coordination, with only a limited input and participation of the civil society. It is during the process of drafting the second plan that most Focal Points succeeded in more actively engaging with a civil society and in better connecting with media. Some NS/NP, however, have generated wide media awareness since the beginning, in particular, when the AoC's objectives related to current national public concerns.

Regional level
A majority of NS/NP stresses strong regional focuses, in particular, for Latin America, the Balkans (important EU coordination) and regional mediation by Algeria. Regional trends appear in various NS/NP, in particular, with Balkans/Eastern Europe or with Latin America:

• Balkans/Eastern Europe have a strong focus on internal ethnic diversity (including the Roma population), and it is clear that these countries have gone through recent efforts in that direction and wish to pursue them;
• Latin America shows strong efforts in integration of cultural diversity both with regard to indigenous populations and to migrant groups.

This tends to confirm the utility of drafting AoC Regional Strategies.

International level
In terms of international cooperation, most of initiatives listed in the NS/NP focus on a high-level intercultural dialogue projects and less on practical coordinated efforts, integrating civil society and grassroots organizations. For instance, interfaith and intercultural dialogue fora, international mediation, regional coordination summits and initiatives are most commonly mentioned, while direct cooperation between "decentralized" national partners of different countries is rarely highlighted.

Several NS/NP make a clear distinction between the aims and activities in the NS/NP at the level of internal affairs and those at external affairs. A relative importance given to one or the other, however, it differs between countries. An assumption that can be made regarding countries that have not yet drafted a National Strategy/National Plan is that they focus on the AoC's potential for international affairs more than on cultural diversity at the internal level.

III. Analysis and recommendations

Strengths and weaknesses of national strategies and plans
The process of elaborating, implementing and coordinating NS/NP contributes to raising more awareness at the national level about countries' efforts with regard to management of cultural diversity and about the AoC in general. It also helps to enhance a coherence of pre-existing initiatives dealing with an intercultural cooperation and contributes to a better exchange of information among national actors and with international actors.

NS/NP have a potential for increasing direct contacts, coordination and initiating cooperation between actors at the international level within a number of projects. It seems, however, that this potential has not yet been fully realized and that only few examples of direct cooperation and exchange have been generated by the existence of a NS/NP. This may be a result of a short period during which a NS/NP has existed, and also a lack of quick and efficient mechanisms for coordination.

NS/NP are also useful for connecting efforts toward intercultural cooperation at the national level (e.g. diverse communities, religious groups, migrant integration) with intercultural questions at the international level (e.g. dialogue initiatives, conflict transformation, diplomatic mediation). More specifically, working on NS/NP can contribute to building a better understanding of the interconnected work on Islam-West divides and on global cultural diversity.

Notable progress is made between the first and the following phases of the NS/NP. Focal Points have made it clear that the second phases had a greater improvement. Thus one can see the NS/NP as iterative exercises and learning spaces on how to enhance quality of the AoC-related

actions. Several Focal Points have expressed their willingness to support other GoF's members in building up their NS/NP.

Good practices

In terms of organizational structure: Focal Points are intended to be responsible for implementing the AoC's agenda at the national level. It is up to countries to appoint their national coordinators or to appoint a national coordination body or an equivalent administrative body.

Due to a wide range of cross-cutting tasks to be performed, it seems that Focal Points should be supported by other national partners dealing with the AoC-related fields, in order to ensure good national coordination with ministries and local stakeholders (including civil society and media).

In terms of participation and inclusiveness: a mechanism of consultation with a civil society enables a better participation and inclusiveness. Stakeholders such as NGO, youth organization, diaspora/migrants' communities, minority religious institutions, media centers, overseas actors and development agencies, research centers, etc, are central in expanding popular awareness, ownership and legitimacy of the NS/NP. The following measures can be considered as good practices to ensure participation and representation:

• National coordination meetings that include a variety of actors;
• Consultation that were made possible for the public at large (via a website posting, for instance);
• Public debate in partnership with media (such as a TV program).

IV. Improving coordination between the Group of Friends and the AoC

The process of reviewing NS/NP has occasioned a wider reflection on an overall cooperation between the Focal Points and AoC, and has led to a set of recommendations of a general scope.

Improving and reinforcing the support and coordination of AoC Secretariat
The following points have been suggested by several Focal Points in order to strengthen the efficiency of the Focal Points-AoC Secretariat coordination:

• A newsletter is an appreciated and useful means of information. However, the AoC Secretariat should invest even more resources and efforts in disseminating information and in connecting projects and implementing actors across countries and at a decentralized level (such as connecting Focal Points with NGOs, with other Focal Points, interconnecting projects, and suggesting partnerships between national partners);
• The AoC Secretariat should focus more on an outreach and communication, in particular, with a civil society and NGO. In addition, a better coordination and an improved follow-up on all events organized by the HLG members would increase the AoC's visibility;
• Global GoF's meetings are useful, but smaller affinity groups or thematic platforms could increase efficiency, and lead to concrete outcomes and deliverables. Some countries would be willing to take a lead on these;
• There should be more clarity on what kind of projects can be initiated and implemented by the AoC Secretariat and how countries can submit new projects. Countries must also have a better understanding on how management and responsibilities of projects are defined.

On the basis of the Focal Points' recommendations and the analysis of needs, the AoC Secretariat considers that the following measures could be adopted:

Creation of an index of projects on the AoC's website to better highlight contents of the NS/NP, including all NS/NP projects, and a search engine that illustrates potential synergies. Updates and news could be also fed into an index of projects. Each Focal Point would have responsibility of feeding information and updates on the AoC's website. An index of projects can contribute to a more systematic connection by the AoC Secretariat of initiatives and countries to each others, in particular with civil society organizations (allowing to bridge the gap with NGOs that often do not think of addressing their governments directly).

Provision of technical support to Focal Points, possibly by making regular bilateral or regional consultations with representatives of each GoF country, in order to offer assistance, deepen understanding of each country's NS/NP, discuss contents and assess a need for coordination. This exercise should be carried out with a necessary support of international and regional organizations, members of the GoF.

Thematic Platforms: suggestion for thematic platforms made by Switzerland has been found by many Focal Points as very relevant. Several interlocutors said that they understood that platforms would be a privileged space for informal exchange and learning – addressed mainly by desk-level officers. Any recommendations made over the course of such discussions would not imply in the slightest an official position of participating countries, and, as such, this group would in no way be a decision-making body. The expected outcome of platforms would be an exchange on and promotion of best practices; discussion and launch of projects and, possibly, search for funding. During the discussion with the AoC Secretariat, the following have been mentioned as topics of potential interest:

• Interfaith cooperation in development and humanitarian field;
• Media literacy;
• Migrant integration practices for inclusive societies;
• Bridging the gap between public/private and religious/secular schools (including training for religious leaders);
• Youth participation;
• City / Public Diplomacy;
• Image of the other in school textbooks (including teaching of local history).

Reinforcing the support and commitment of GoF countries to AoC projects

In order to encourage a more direct and active involvement of the Focal Points and countries they represent (allowing to enable more exchanges and influences on the activities implemented), the AoC Secretariat has discussed a possibility of designating direct sponsors for specific Alliance's projects among the GoF countries. This "sponsorship" would involve specific countries more directly in steering certain projects, providing them with an opportunity to contribute their suggestions more directly and to be more visible internationally. In exchange, countries would support the project politically and financially; if possible, promoting it also to other countries.

• Assessing with a question in the questionnaire if this "sponsorship" of projects is appealing to GoF countries, and at what conditions; how much they support the project politically, financially, if they steer and advise and/or how/to what extent they participate in decision-making process, etc;
• Preparing a "shopping list" for all projects, including a short description, stakes and challenges of project, and special needs for sponsorship;
• During the Rabat meeting, calling for registration of sponsor countries that would be providing direct support to their project and would assist in steering and advising projects;
• As a process of enhancing the AoC Secretariat's support to the GoF with NS/NP is very time-consuming, it might be necessary to consider expanding the AoC's staff. A call for secondment could be made to the GoF countries during the Rabat meeting, in order to assist the strategic partnership team with NS/NP.

Role of international organizations-members of the GoF

The review process has not yet been extended to the international organizations. However, a similar consultation should be made in coming months to capitalize on the potential of these partnerships. A review of the MoUs and subsequent phone conferences will be organized.

The role of the IO is capital in the support they can provide to GoF countries in drafting NS/NP. In addition, a potential of influence of the IO should also be enhanced through drafting of the Implementation Plans deriving from MoUs.