



Third Meeting of the UN Alliance of Civilizations Focal Points

Summary Report

Overview

The Third Meeting of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Focal Points has been generously hosted by ISESCO in Rabat, November 10-11, 2009. It was convened in presence of over 100 participants and guests of ISESCO and Moroccan Government, and featured participation of 51 countries and 9 international organizations, members of the Group of Friends of the Alliance (see Annex 1).

The aim of the Meeting was to enhance the capacity of the Focal Points to advance the agenda of the Alliance by sharing experiences on Regional and National Strategies for Inter-Cultural Dialogue and discussing current projects managed by the UN Alliance of Civilizations, as well as initiatives launched by countries and international organizations.

During the Rabat Meeting, the UN Alliance of Civilizations High Representative called on countries, through their Focal Points, to more actively engage in the Alliance's work and contribute to the development of specific projects, as well as make progress towards adoption of the Regional and National Strategies.

1. Opening Session

The Rabat Meeting has been opened by ISESCO Director General, H.E. Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri, H.E. Ms. Latifa Akharbach, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Government of Morocco, H.E. Mr. Jorge Sampaio, High Representative of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, and HE. Mr. Bensalem Himmich, Minister of Culture. The speeches were followed by the screening of a short documentary on the UN Alliance of Civilizations (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2nEU0YljQ0>).

During the opening, *Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri* welcomed the distinguished participants and reiterated the ISESCO's commitment to the UN Alliance of Civilizations' objectives and its determination to promote the dialogue of civilizations. Dr. Altwajri drew the attention of participants to the move from theorizing on the idea of the Alliance to concrete actions, as illustrated by the Second UN AoC Implementation Plan (2009-2011), and the development of regional strategies (see Annex 2).

Ms. Latifa Akharbach commended the ISESCO's Director General. She noted that progress accumulated by the UN Alliance of Civilizations Fora (Madrid 2008 and Istanbul 2009) testifies to a strong commitment of the Group of Friends' members to anchor the principles and values of dialogue and understanding among peoples. Ms. Akharbach re-affirmed the Moroccan Government's support to the efforts of the international community towards the promotion of dialogue among cultures, in particular through the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

In his opening remarks, *President Jorge Sampaio* stressed the importance of the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2010), coordinated by UNESCO. He encouraged countries to actively seek mutual exchanges, cross-fertilization of cultures, religions, sciences, arts, concepts and various ways of thinking; to contribute to the development of innovative tools for intercultural dialogue and to foster intercultural competencies and skills. He also insisted that members of the Group of Friends put emphasis on Regional Strategies and National Plans as key strategic tools to anchor the Alliance at the grassroots level and develop its local footing. In his conviction, promotion of public policies related to "good governance of cultural diversity" (or "democratic governance") can be accomplished only on the basis of a

national action and regional cooperation, involving a wide array of players, including governments, cities, civil society (NGOs, foundations, faith-based organizations, etc), private sector as well as international and regional organizations. President Sampaio reminded that the National Strategies and Plans are an invitation to countries to generate an internal process of ownership of the UN Alliance of Civilizations' goals and aims; they are intended to create concrete opportunities to exchange experiences and lessons learned regarding the common challenge faced while dealing with an increased cultural diversity, new cohesion and identity problems. Finally, among other items, President Sampaio called upon Focal Points and representatives from the Gulf, Asian, and African regions to develop their own Regional Strategies for the UN Alliance of Civilizations with a view to showcasing them during the next UNAOC Fora (see Annex 3).

2. Review on the AoC National Plans

On the basis of a first review of the existing National Plans, the UN Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat presented a number of findings and core recommendations for countries which are working on such documents. The National Plans were described as both an iterative process and a learning space to advance the Alliance's objectives at the national level. It has been noted that preparation of a National Plan in coordination with national partners and civil society proved to bring an added value to the document, increasing national ownership for and public awareness around it (see Annex 4).

3. The road to Rio Forum

The Focal Point for the UNAOC in Brazil, Ambassador Lindgren Alves, briefly introduced the broad objectives and main features of the Third Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations to be held in Rio, May 28-29, 2010. The very fact that the Third Forum is held in Rio, he suggested, is offering an opportunity to look beyond the 'Muslim-Western world focus' and to address the issue of cultural diversity from a wider perspective.

The overarching theme of the Forum will be 'Bridging Cultures, Building Peace'. A Youth event, various 'tea sessions' (equivalent to the Istanbul Forum breakfasts), a Focal Points meeting, as well as regular working sessions and plenaries, will be organized both during core dates (May 28-29) and the day before the official opening (May 27). Working sessions will be clustered around the main topics of education, media and migration, which sometimes are combined with other cross-cutting issues, such as urban change, employment, gender, history, politics, religions, conflict resolution and human rights.

4. Regional Strategies and other AoC initiatives

The Focal Points were provided with an opportunity to learn about progress made with regards to the Regional Strategies. Specifically, a) the South East European Regional Strategy is nearly finalized and its official launch will be held in Sarajevo, December 14 2009; b) as a follow up to the 'Restore Trust, Rebuild Bridges' cluster of projects, President Mubarak of Egypt will host a Conference in Alexandria (spring 2010) with a view to adopting an AoC Regional Strategy for the Euro-Mediterranean area; c) pre-consultations with SEGIB were held by the UN AoC High Representative towards a possible AoC Regional Strategy for Latin America.

Further to the overview of the Regional Strategies, the High Representative shared some concerns with the Focal Points and urged them to contribute inputs. The three main points raised were focused on a: a) link between human rights and National Plans/Regional Strategies for intercultural dialogue; b) need to invest in public policies as they relate to cultural diversity and to intercultural dialogue, and a need to integrate their development as part of an overall political vision or National Strategy on life-long learning how to live together; and c) need of the Alliance to further expand its cooperation with international and regional organizations in order to strengthen intercultural dialogue in external and international policies (see Annex 5).

Following this update, the UN Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat presented a range of projects and initiatives launched and managed by the UN Alliance of Civilizations (see Annex 6), with the aim to closely engage countries in these projects and to increase their ownership. These presentations generated a number of comments, questions and remarks by the Focal Points. The main points made may be summarized as follows:

- Countries and international organizations welcomed the expansion of the UNAOC RRMM Programme (Indonesia, Albania), as well as commented that the RRMM implementation was successfully done in the Euro-Med region, showing good coordination of partners (European Commission);
- Life-long learning of inter-cultural skills is a very innovative idea to be developed further (Council of Europe);
- Argentina reiterated its commitment to work on the media literacy thematic platform. It invited other interested countries to join with the aim to announce the establishment of a thematic platform at the Rio Forum in May 2010;
- There is a growing need in various parts of the world for the UNAOC's documents and information. If the Alliance could provide them in various languages for rapid dissemination to the national media and authorities, that would be very helpful (Bangladesh);
- While recognizing the necessity of exchange programmes, it is important to ensure that they are accessible to participants who would normally have no chance to travel abroad or be exposed to other cultures (Egypt);
- Bi-lateral exchange programmes should be more encouraged as this is a natural evolution of the exchanges concept; one could explore the example of La Francophonie's programme, within which students from the South go to the North and vice versa (France);
- Bringing the Alliance's work at the local level as part of the National Strategies and Plans would be something that countries would welcome (Germany, OIC);
- A few countries reported that they are working on National Strategies. They include the Kingdom of Bahrain, Oman, Ethiopia, Switzerland, Germany, and Morocco;
- The Global Forum on Migration and Development (launched in 2006) and the UNAOC could explore further synergies, as the Global Forum deals with UNAOC-related issues like inclusion of migrants (the IOM);
- Spain informed participants that the UN General Assembly Resolution on the Alliance (see Annex 7) was adopted on November 10, 2009. It is an important step in the further development of the initiative and a recognition by the Group of Friends (Russian Federation, Italy, etc);
- Germany re-iterated its willingness to host a Focal Points meeting in Berlin in 2010;
- The Council of Europe informed that the North-South Center organizes (in partnership with the UN Alliance of Civilizations) a Forum on Culture of Human Rights (Lisbon, November 2009);
- A careful and thorough review of all existing projects and initiatives on the level of countries and various international organizations is useful prior to preparation of all National Plans (Germany, the Council of Europe);
- The UN Alliance of Civilizations needs to further crystallize its uniqueness while compared to many others initiatives in the field of human rights; its pragmatic approach is making it distinct. And in its activities, it is important to avoid duplication with other international organizations (Italy, Russian Federation, France, etc).

5. Thematic platforms

The Focal Point of Switzerland, Ambassador Alexandre Fasel, made a presentation of thematic platforms (see Annex 8), including a general framework, objectives and selection of themes as a start, for the Group of Friends' considerations (Bridging divides in the field of humanitarian aid and development; Media literacy; Youth participation; Public diplomacy/City diplomacy; Migrant Integration practices for inclusive societies; Bridging the gap between public school systems and private religious schools; Image of the other, including teaching of local history).

Thematic platforms have been proposed as a response to the UNAOC High Representative's invitation to mobilize the Group of Friends and build upon its experience and expertise. Ambassador Fasel announced that an informal meeting would be held in Bern, Switzerland, in order to discuss work modalities of the establishment of a dialogue platform on bridging divides in the field of humanitarianism and development (as one of possible platforms).

6. Roundtables on regional initiatives and National Strategies

6.1. AoC Regional Strategy for South East Europe

Attended by countries involved in drafting the AoC Regional Strategy for South East Europe (Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Greece, Hungary, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain and Turkey), the roundtable meeting discussed the draft documents to be adopted in the forthcoming Conference in Sarajevo (i.e. draft political Declaration on the Regional Strategy, the draft Strategy itself), allowing for further progress to be made. Other aspects of the preparations for the upcoming Sarajevo conference, aimed to launch the Strategy on the Ministerial level of participating countries, were also discussed.

6.2 AoC Regional Strategy for Latin America

During this roundtable, attended by Argentina, Brazil, Chile, France, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Spain, SEGIB, and the IOM, it has been recommended to enlarge the number of Group of Friends' members in that region from the current 12 to, hopefully, many more. The countries agreed to take advantage of the upcoming SEGIB Summit in Portugal (November 29-December 1 2009) in order to promote the Alliance (a statement is available here - <http://www.segib.org/noticias.php?id=952&idioma=esp>).

6.3 Reinforcing the inclusion of an Asian perspective in the UNAOC's work and activities

Consultations among countries of the Asian region have been held and concluded with a number of useful suggestions. Specifically, Bangladesh, Malaysia, China, Indonesia, Kingdom of Bahrain, and India, which took part in the roundtable, proposed that the UN Alliance of Civilizations High Representative submits a formal letter to heads of ASEAN, SAARC, GCC and Arab League, requesting to include the Alliance's activities in their regular work. On their own level, the Focal Points agreed to inform the secretariats of these organizations of the debate taking place in Rabat. While suggesting this, it has been taken into consideration that these groups/organizations have a good infrastructure and existing departments working on the UNAOC's issues; their international ministerial level fora could provide a platform for better awareness raising and publicity on the Alliance in the Asian region.

6.4 "Image of the Other in School Textbooks"

During this roundtable, the participating organizations - ISESCO, OIC, Al Akhawayn University, League of Arab States, and ALECSO – exchanged views on the subject. They shared their experiences and lessons learned while implementing initiatives aimed at addressing the issue of the image of the other in textbooks and history books. They also learned about each others' projects in a general field of dialogue. Finally, participants were informed of the various trainings, such as ALECSO's training of history teachers, which was organized together with the Council of Europe.

6.5 Strengthening the UNAOC's engagement with NGOs

Morocco, Germany and Spain briefly reported on their experiences in working with the civil society and recognized the importance of the Alliance's project 'Marketplace of Ideas'. They stressed the benefits of an open and inclusive involvement of the civil society in the process of adoption and implementation of the National Strategies and Plans. Spain is currently working on its second National Plan, which is characterized by close inclusion of civil society, private sector and other stakeholders.

6.6 The Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue

During this roundtable, the Council of Europe presented its White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue – "Living Together as Equals in Dignity", a value-based policy document approved by the 47 member states of the organization. Participants included representatives of Finland, France, Lithuania, Russia, Portugal, Spain, Tanzania, CPLP, European Commission, the IOM and SEGIB. They were informed of five basic policy areas outlined in the document: 1) democratic governance of cultural diversity; 2) participation and democratic citizenship; 3) education for intercultural skills; 4) creating spacing for inter-cultural dialogue and 5) intercultural dialogue in the international relations. They also learned about practical follow up activities to the White Paper, such as a campaign against discrimination through and for the media, and training on intercultural skills.

7. Key Orientations and Calls Made

Following the two-day deliberations among the Focal Points, the UN Alliance of Civilizations High Representative concluded the Rabat Meeting putting forward a set of objectives and calling for a number of actions to be made by the Group of Friends with the invaluable support of the Focal Points:

- Regular meetings of the UNAOC Focal Points contribute to establishing a community of national coordinators, helping to promote and advance the UN Alliance of Civilizations initiative, which, in its essence, is a platform for open debate and deliberations;
- The Alliance and its partner international organizations will continue their productive collaboration to advance networking, coordinate efforts, avoid duplications, and maximize synergies;
- The Focal Points were invited to save the date for the next (Fourth) Meeting of the Focal Points that will be convened in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, May 27, 2010. Their participation in and contribution to the success of the Third Forum in Rio (May 28-29, 2010) will be most welcome;
- A call has been made to advance on the Regional Strategies, National Plans and thematic platforms. A range of meetings will be held in the next months (Bern November 2009 meeting on the thematic platforms; Sarajevo December 2009 meeting on the Regional SEE Strategy; Spring 2010 meeting on the Strategy in Euro-Mediterranean region; consultations regarding the Regional Strategy for the Latin America will proceed);
- A special call for the Asian and African countries to more actively involve themselves in the UN Alliance of Civilizations and boost it in the respective regions has been made;
- All Focal Points were requested to reiterate a call for the Governments to commit themselves to at least one project that the UN Alliance of Civilizations manages;
- The Focal Points were invited to consider joining thematic platforms and transmit their interests to the UN Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat;
- Countries and organizations were encouraged to replicate the Alliance's projects and, among other suggestions, create a National UNAOC website with the basic UNAOC documentation translated into national language(s); support Youth Solidarity Fund initiatives; provide the Rapid Response Media Mechanism Programme with an array of names to feed the Global Experts Finder resource; organize a series of seminars on RRMM for media or Alliance for corporate sector; commit to "Dialogue Café network" by including one or two cities in it; commit to involve foundations and universities into the Alliance's networks; organize UNAOC national events focused on youth, education, migration or/and media, based on national and international interests, etc;
- The Focal Points were encouraged to support the sustainability of the Alliance through reminding their Governments of a need to fund it steadily and regularly.

8. List of Annexes

Annex 1: List of Participants

Annex 2: Opening remarks by ISESCO

Annex 3: Opening remarks by UNAOC

Annex 4: Overview on the National Strategies and Plans

Annex 5: Presentation on Regional Strategies

Annex 6: Presentation on UNAOC projects and initiatives

Annex 7: UNAOC GA Resolution

Annex 8: Presentation by Switzerland on thematic platforms