

*Check against delivery*



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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**4th Focal Points meeting**

**Opening remarks**

*Berlin,*

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Ambassador Kreft

Excellencies

Dear Focal Points

Ladies and Gentlemen

- I would like to start by thanking Ambassador Kreft for his kind words and ask him to convey to his Government on our behalf our heartfelt thanks for hosting the 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Focal Points of the Alliance of Civilizations.
- Let me also greet you all and thank you for the long journey you made to be here today - I see so many familiar faces that it seems to me rather like a reunion!
- For those who are here for the first time representing your countries, let me welcome you on board and convey warm regards to your colleagues, Focal Points of the Alliance.
- I am more than happy to open our meeting and without taking too much of your time, let me make a few remarks to share with you some thoughts on how I see this meeting.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Friends

- I see the annual meetings of the Focal Points as privileged moments of dialogue and cooperation in the life of the Alliance.

- It is a moment of exchange of ideas and opinions – amongst yourselves and with the secretariat. It is an opportunity to raise questions, to share doubts and concerns, to highlight successful stories, to inform and be informed.
- As you know the Alliance is very much a flexible initiative and this meeting of the Focal Points is very important to feed my reflections on future actions.
- Next year the 3<sup>rd</sup> Implementation Plan (2011-2013) will be presented and it will be an occasion to reinforce the shortcomings, fill in the gaps and provide the Alliance with a new agenda for the next two years.
- Therefore the outcomes of your reflections during these two days will serve as an input for this task ahead.
- As you know since our last meeting one year ago in Rabat, the Alliance has continued to grow and it is time now to reinforce its capacity to deliver, to provide it with more solid grounds, to give it a new impetus.
- With such a global membership and the growing array of issues to be addressed, the Alliance must totally rely on its members to deliver.
- This is something that I want to stress. Not only because ownership is the key word to make the Alliance's aims advance on the ground, but also because the Alliance is not intended to become one more UN agency.
- Therefore, Focal Points are responsible to reflect the Alliance at national level, to implement actions, to build up a program of initiatives in close cooperation with the relevant national stakeholders and partners.

- Within international organizations Focal points are facilitators of our cooperation, they should assist in identifying synergies, in advising on possible common actions and in opening up new avenues for cooperation in mutual benefit.
- Let's not forget that after all, behind all organizations there are the same members, the same countries, the same tax payers. Let's not forget that the international system is not a market ruled by competition but it is there for cooperation and cooperation means mutual assistance in achieving goals and coordination.

Dear Friends, Ladies and Gentlemen

- I have never doubted that the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is the right initiative for our challenging times.
- It drew the attention of international community's attention to the need – the urgent need – to address intercultural diversity as one of the main challenges of the twenty-first century. It put this issue on the international agenda.
- Now the question is: are intercultural diversity issues high enough on the international agenda? Are decision-makers paying enough attention to the need to take action? Are sufficient resources allocated to confront this challenge?
- My answer is mixed. On the one hand, over the past years the Alliance managed to make good progress. It is now clear that the Alliance is a global

Forum for Dialogue. On the other hand, the international agenda is so full of competing priorities that the Alliance is lagging behind.

- Take for instance the agenda of the Millennium Development Goals – it is, and so much the better, a top priority for international cooperation.
- But isn't the Alliance somehow an indispensable complement to achieve some of its goals? Take the example of education, of gender issues, of partnerships. Isn't cultural diversity one of the pillars of sustainable development? Aren't good relations among peoples, cultures and religions a sine qua non condition for peace, security and development?
- But – let's be honest – has the Alliance the same kind of visibility? The same level of attention? The same amount of resources?
- Of course not – and here we need to recognize that many more efforts have to be made to prioritize the Alliance's agenda within the United Nations system and the international community.
- This is a goal to which countries can contribute and in which I myself will do much more work.

Ladies and Gentlemen

- A second point I want to make regards the much needed interaction between civil society, the private sector and the Alliance in order to achieve results on the ground.

- The Alliance is smoothly developing its network but we need to give a push and make extra efforts.
- For that we need your help because you are well placed to convey news to your constituencies and generate a bottom up process that brings the Alliance's aims to grass-roots and community level.
- I am pleased to announce that I started preliminary exchanges with our friends and hosts of the Doha Forum and that one of the points that we raised is the possibility of having a civil society gathering within six months of the Forum to prepare it, to feed it with new ideas, new projects and new platforms of cooperation. It is still an idea but I very much hope that this will help us innovate, root the Forums at a deeper level and improve the quality of the deliveries.
- Furthermore, providing the Alliance with extra support from the philanthropic and the private sector is also an aim that we should pursue. Not only in terms of funding but also in terms of experience, know-how and innovative practices.
- Here again your collaboration is extremely important.
- Summing up, I would tend to suggest that Focal points organize at national level an annual event on the Alliance, an "Alliance Day" in order to raise the visibility of the Alliance, to bring together your constituencies and stakeholders and help us to enlarge our global network.
- In my view this would be a step forward in consolidating the ownership of the Alliance.

Ladies and Gentlemen

- We are witnessing hard times around the world. Conflicts and tensions, intolerance, xenophobia and discrimination are on the rise.
- “Violence and terrorism from wherever it may proceed as well as religious extremism, all forms of racism, anti-Semitism, anti-Christianism and Islamophobia”, as the recent Synod put it, is to be condemned.
- But in addition to condemning we need to act, we need to confront Islamophobia, anti-Christianism and anti-Semitism, we need to address racism, xenophobia and discrimination.
- We need to address the fears and anxieties of populations, to tackle real problems – social, economic and political ones.
- Tensions flare up when individuals or groups feel that their interests are under threat. Economic, financial and social crisis fuels fears and fears breed tensions, as well as resentment and hostility against minorities and migrants.
- Tensions also arise when the rights of minorities and their place in society are at stake. Almost all societies in the world are confronted with the challenge of balancing the rights of cultural communities and the need to maintain social cohesion.
- In times of intercultural tensions, it is important to uphold the rights of minorities who are often victims of harassment and discrimination. It is also

crucial to make the case for migration and remind ourselves of all the benefits it brings to our societies.

- There is urgency in taking action, in implementing long term policies to address these challenges ahead.
  
- This is why I think National Plans and Regional Strategies are key tools to frame action. Because although our goals are global, action is always local if we want to produce results on the ground.

Dear Friends

- I hope that your discussions and reflections will be fruitful and that tomorrow at the end of this intensive two-day meeting, when you are back home, you will feel this is a win-win situation - that you gave and you received new ideas and suggestions, that new opportunities for cooperation came up and that a renewed sense of belonging to a community fills not only your minds but also your hearts.
  
- I thank you