

Education Issues and Efforts toward an Alliance of Civilizations

Education is a theme that must be addressed at many levels in order to bring the concept of an Alliance of Civilizations to practical fulfillment. The most obvious educational efforts to be considered are those that seek to replace ignorance, misunderstanding, and intolerance of other groups of people with greater knowledge, understanding, and tolerance. Education is also a unifying concept that links up with efforts to involve youth in constructive social engagement, to utilize various forms of media to increase knowledge, understanding and dialogue, and to increase opportunities for integration of immigrant populations and other sources of social and cultural diversity at the local, national and international levels. Education plays a major role in improving global interaction among contemporary societies that the Alliance of Civilizations seeks to achieve.

The complexity and connectedness of modern life requires a holistic attitude toward knowledge and awareness of the significance, dignity and responsibility of each individual in the overall context of humanity. It requires what might be called educational security, in which regional, class, gender and age equity in educational opportunity become vital goals to promote constructive social engagement over violence. Knowledge acquisition must also be considered as a vital goal for all, because the actions of individuals everywhere can negatively or positively affect the collective situation locally, in the nation, the region and the world. The current cartoon crisis provides an excellent example of ways in which myriad individual decisions and actions can impact global society in far-reaching ways. The Alliance of Civilization initiative is currently researching two major avenues of educational issues and efforts—those related to the structures through which education is delivered, whether bricks and mortar or electronic media, and those related to the content or substance of education, including the methodology and spirit through which content is presented to the learner.

The Education pages of the Alliance of Civilizations web site present five sets of issues:

1. Access to educational opportunities, from basic literacy to vocational and higher education
2. Education for a global society, including literacy in economic, civic, and cultural/geographic knowledge
3. Curriculum to educate the whole person across the spectrum of the humanities and sciences – education as more than a mere instrument for material improvement,
4. Religious liberty and education about the human religious experience
5. Civic education for positive social and political engagement

The issues laid out and the solutions proposed will be presented for the consideration of the High Level Group members appointed by United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, and for interactive dialogue with the global public at large. Through the active exchange of ideas, it is hoped that these ideas will be refined, that existing initiatives that are already having a positive effect will come to light, and new initiatives will be developed in response to the challenges put forth by the Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat.