

UN HIGH REPRESENTATIVE FOR
THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

Address to the AoC Group of Friends
(Ministerial level)

United Nations,
ECOSOC Chamber
September, 26th, 2007

Mr Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General

Mr. Srgjan Kerim, President of the General Assembly

Ministers

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

- First of all, let me extend my warmest greetings to you all, dear Friends of the Alliance, and thank you so much for being here, in this extremely busy time.
- I would particularly like to welcome the Secretary-General and the President of the General Assembly who were so kind as to join us. Your presence here is much more than a signal of friendship. It is the expression of a commitment to the ideals of the Alliance and it gives us a great deal of encouragement.

Excellencies

- When I was appointed, late April, by you, Mr. Secretary General, as the High Representative for the Alliance, the Group of Friends was made up of around forty members.
- Today it counts more than seventy. Almost every day, there is a newcomer and our ever-enlarging Group of Friends has now reached the critical mass of participation.
- This means that the Alliance is really gaining momentum and that we have to maintain it. But to keep it, we clearly need to turn this current wave of good will into commitments, we need to focus on concrete action, we need to deliver.
- The Alliance is dealing with the major problems of our times – how to live together in a globalizing world? How to avoid that clashes of civilizations anywhere become clashes everywhere? How to bridge cultural and religious fault lines dividing our societies? How to improve mutual respect and understanding between different communities and societies?
- This is the global challenge the Alliance of Civilizations is faced with and which it has to address in concrete terms.

- Turning this global challenge into “glocal” deliverables is therefore the AoC main task. By “glocal” I mean that deliverables have to be extensively underpinned by a global approach, but have to be implemented at the local level – I mean at national, regional or local level.
- But to achieve these goals, the strong leverage of the AoC Group of Friends is absolutely critical as this community constitutes the main political body supporting the Alliance.
- You are the leading and primary partners, particularly in the implementation process of the principles, values and priorities of the Alliance, according to the High level Group.
- You are in a key position to identify projects that reflect good practice in building cross-cultural understanding and to implement policies aimed at improving intercultural relations among communities, related to the four main fields covered by the Alliance, ie – education, youth, migrations and media.
- This is why we must commit ourselves to finding the best strategies for the Group of Friends as a whole to engage in practical action.

- In the matters the Alliance deals with, there are no unilateral solutions nor is there any place for isolated attitudes. We need shared policies creating strong solidarity links between the partners as cultural and religious fault lines divide all our societies.
- For the Alliance to gain political momentum, we need to scale up our efforts, strengthen our ties and commitment to the Alliance.
- Therefore, one functional priority will be indeed to set up the Trust Fund to support the Alliance's activities. In the very near future, you will receive a letter calling for contributions.
- But our top priority is to work in closer collaboration with all partners, both within and outside the UN system.
- In this regard, I will consult with the United Nations Secretary General in order to create a Consultative Board to provide advice on the Alliance of Civilizations' strategic direction and main political options to implement the overall recommendations of the Report.

- Another crucial point is to engage countries – at national, regional and local level – and international organizations and bodies both to collaborate more closely in achieving the Alliance’s Implementation Plan goals, particularly by supporting the two main projects to be managed by the AoC Secretariat – the online Clearinghouse and the Rapid Response Media Mechanism.
- Indeed, regional organizations also play an important role in bridging divides – namely the so called “West-Islam divide” - by promoting cross-cultural dialogue among partners and within member countries. Asian, Pacific, African, European and Latin America regional bodies need to be mobilized to make the AoC a success.
- This is why I made a set of suggestions, mentioned in the Annotated Agenda that has been circulated.
- Allow me to mention three of them of critical importance: the development by international organizations and bodies of Charters for partnering with the Alliance; the development by countries of their own “National Strategy for cross-cultural dialogue”; and the appointment by countries and international organizations and bodies, of a “Coordinator”, responsible for the implementation of the Charter, ensuring internal coordination, as well as to serve as a focal point in the relations with the Alliance’s Secretariat and other partners.

- In my view, there is enough room for creativity and innovation in the search for new solutions to old problems. The Alliance could serve as a catalyst for pilot initiatives that would be conducted in partnership across nations and/or regions as well as between different international or regional organizations and bodies. The Alliance could also help to ensure greater balance, cohesion and coordination between the various initiatives that the Group of Friends members propose in response to these suggestions.
- Let me underline that, in my view, the Alliance is not about keeping organizing conferences and lectures, but it has a clear political scope – as a tool for peace - which needs to be integrated in the domestic agendas of the countries, in the international agenda and indeed in all aspects of the work of the United Nations.
- I would tend to strongly advise you to use the time until the first annual Forum of the Alliance to promote in your countries and within your organizations a debate on the suggestions included in the Annotated Agenda.
- Likewise we need to take advantage of the Forum as an outstanding event to make a major step forward and present to the public commitments to turn the Alliance’s goals into deliverables.

- As we normally do among friends, I have been frank and sincere with you. I'll very much appreciate your comments and opinions on this issue.
- Please do not hesitate to express your doubts and questions. Maybe they are also mine. But, together, I am sure, we will succeed in “our wonderful but impossible task”, as a very good friend of mine put it when I first discussed with him the demanding challenges of the Alliance.

Many thanks