

Statement by Jorge Sampaio, High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations

Over the last few days, news from various parts of the world has been dominated by stories of discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, hate speech and growing tensions around issues that lie at the heart of relations between cultures and religions.

Disseminated globally, some of these local stories can however spur extremism and polarization throughout the world and create added tensions among communities and societies. This is the case of Pastor Terry Jones' outrageous call to burn the Koran on the anniversary of 9/11. His gesture must be firmly condemned.

To remain silent would be to accept the banality of hate speech and incitement to hatred. We have to be able to act against common threats such as the use of extremist narratives to inflame opinion and cause unrest and violence.

This is precisely the aim of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations launched in 2005 by Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey, against a backdrop dominated by the global war on terror and Huntington's prediction on the clash of civilizations. Five years later, all these increased signs of rising discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance show how much this initiative is a priority in order to achieve cohesion and inclusive societies, as well as security and peace among peoples and nations.

As a result, it is urgent that everyone – civil society leaders, young people, religious leaders and citizens generally – work together to address hatred, dispel stereotypes, and help create the necessary conditions to improve

understanding among peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarisation and extremism. This is the mission of the Alliance through a long term approach focused on education, youth, media and migration. That is not an easy task. But that is all the more reason to try harder, with all our tools and our will.