

*Check against delivery*



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

**5<sup>th</sup> GLOBAL FORUM**

**Official Opening**

*Vienna, 27 February 2013*

Mr. Heinz Fischer, Federal President of Austria,  
Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister of Austria,  
our hosts at this Forum,  
Mr. Ban ki Moon, Secretary General,  
Your Majesty, Emir of Qatar,  
Mr. Yeccep Erdogan, Prime Minister of Turkey,  
Mr. José Manuel Margallo, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain,  
Mr. High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, Ambassador Nassir Al Nasser,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear friends of the Alliance of Civilizations,

- Looking back at the past six years, most of us in this room who are passionately committed to building the Alliance of Civilizations should feel happy.
- Indeed, we would have liked to have made more progress in some areas or we would have liked things to have gone better in a number of points.
- But all in all, I make no apology for my admiration for what we have achieved together, thanks to your resolve, commitment and enthusiasm.
- As I have always repeated, the Alliance relies upon your strength and your engagement. The Alliance is all of you. You are the Alliance!
- All together - representatives of governments, civil society, religious leaders, youth representatives, media – you are the peoples of the Alliance.

Dear Friends,

- Once upon a time I visited a famous strategist to brief him about the Alliance. Suddenly he asked me “How many divisions do you have, Sir?”
- I will not tell you my answer. But it is crystal clear that the Alliance has no divisions simply because it is a soft-power tool in your hands. And you, you are the Alliance.
- So – and this is a modest piece of advice – you, who care about achieving the Alliance ‘s goals and about developing further its agenda, go ahead and get serious about fully implementing the founding Report as well as all complementary dimensions that we have introduced in it over the past years.
- What is needed is not so much talking but doing. I firmly believe that priority efforts should be devoted to deliver more, better and faster.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Sometimes looking out upon the world around us it doesn’t seem that we have learned very much about anything – just think of Syria, look at steady sectarian violence in so many societies, at rising tensions between countries and at spreading conflicts in various regions of the world as well as at deeply divided societies increasingly unable to cope with their diversity and how to manage it in a democratic way.
- At the same time, much more has to be done if we want to live up to people’s universal aspiration to live a life in dignity and free from fear.

- Realizing the right to development and alleviation of poverty is an integral part of fundamental rights. But realizing human rights also means that all rights are included: political and civil rights, indeed, but also economic, social and cultural rights as well.
- If rights are indivisible, as they are, all rights are equally important. Therefore all together, from East and West, North and South, we need to do more to meet the universal aspiration for human dignity and freedom of fear which serves as common ground to all societies, cultures and religions.
- From this common ground we can build a unity of purpose and agree on minimum standards of behavior.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Twenty years ago, the first World Conference on Human Rights was held in this very same city of Vienna marking a cornerstone event towards implementing the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Vienna Declaration then adopted by consensus recommended a number of actions aimed at recognizing, promoting, and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in a concrete way. It clearly recognized the responsibility of States in achieving these goals. It invited each State to draw up written plans of Action identifying steps it could take to improve its observance of human rights. It addressed the equal status and human rights of women. It recommended *inter alia* the creation of a High Commissioner for Human Rights which was a true turning point to raise the profile of Human Rights within the UN political processes.
- I am recalling past history, just because I firmly believe that we can build a better future if we are inspired by the successful stories of the past.

- This gathering, our Vienna Forum can pave the way for an ambitious vision for the future. Responsible leadership which is the motto that brings us here today might lead us to recognize that the time has come to convene a World Conference for the Alliance of Civilizations that will mark a cornerstone event to set a new agenda to confront intolerance and extremism.
- We desperately need a kind of “back to zero” bold vision for the Alliance that offers measurable goals to meet and makes people and countries accountable through ownership.
- We need to galvanize global commitment and to mobilize communities to get to zero new intolerance-related incidents; to get to zero intolerance-related deaths; to get to zero discrimination.

Your Excellencies,

- As I draw to a close, let me express my heartfelt thanks to our hosts - Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Vice-Chancellor and Foreign Minister, and to Mr. Heinz Fisher, Federal President, for their wonderful hospitality. Let me also express my gratitude to Ambassador Eichinger and his team for their tireless efforts to prepare this Forum.
- Let me renew my deepest appreciation to the Secretary General, Mr. Ban ki Moon, but indeed also to the sponsors of the Alliance here represented by Mr. Yecep Erdogan, Prime Minister of Turkey and by Mr. José Manuel Margallo, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain, for their commitment and support to the Alliance as well as to myself as its High Representative – thanks to them, this was very much a collaboration job rather than a lonely endeavor.
- Let me also extend my appreciation to His Majesty the Emir of Qatar and to His Excellency Mr. António Patriota, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil as hosts of

our Global Forums in 2011 and 2010, as well as to Dr. R.M. Marty M. Natalegawa, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Indonesia who kindly accepted my challenge of hosting a Global Forum of the Alliance.

- Indeed my gratitude also goes to the Heads and Former Heads of State who have honored us with their presence; to the Foreign Ministers and other representatives of the States and international and regional organizations, members of the Group of Friends; to the large community of Focal Points of the Alliance; to all other partners and friends of the Alliance; to this audience for being here with us.
- I thank you all for your commitment, determination and enthusiasm. Let me also thank you all for the support you have granted to me over these years that I have been at the helm of the Alliance.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Dear Ambassador Al Nasser,

- In life, everything has its time and there is a time for every event.
- As the greatly inspirational poet Rumi says: “yesterday, I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself!
- So, dear Ambassador Al Nasser, it is now high time to hand the torch on to you. I wish you well in your new endeavor!
- Many thanks.