

Report of the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum

Madrid, 15-16 January 2008

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Executive Summary

Hosted by the Government of Spain, the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum convened over 500 leaders, activists, scholars, and public figures from every region of the world in an effort to find new ways to bridge the growing divide between nations and cultures, and to establish new partnerships to promote global understanding.

Over one and a half days, political leaders including heads of State and Government; Ministers and senior officials; civil society activists and Nobel laureates; corporate executives; religious leaders; and leading scholars dialogued and debated with each other, launched practical initiatives and made commitments to action aimed at improving relations across regions and cultures.

Following opening remarks by the President of the Government of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero; the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon; and the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, President Jorge Sampaio, the Forum began with two plenary panels which defined the priority issues to be addressed at the Forum and set a pragmatic tone for the ensuing discussions. Preceding each panel was a major announcement which underscored the Alliance's results-oriented approach:

- H.H. Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned of Qatar announced a \$100 million investment to launch Silatech, a Global Youth Employment initiative involving founding partnerships with the World Bank and Cisco; and
- H.M. Queen Noor of Jordan announced the creation of an independent Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund to support film productions that foster cross-cultural understanding, with an initial investment of \$10 million and founding partnerships with major Hollywood talent, distribution, and production companies.

Participants spent the remainder of the first day of the Forum and the morning of the second day in smaller focused discussion groups, including a high-level political dialogue for members of the Alliance of Civilizations' Group of Friends, eight working sessions, and two working breakfasts. In these sessions, participants delved deeper into the issues of politics, economics, culture, and religion that are central to expanding cross-cultural understanding, shared security, and peace. Several practical initiatives were generated or launched, including:

- The announcement of national and regional strategies for cross-cultural dialogue by governments and multilateral organizations to advance Alliance of Civilizations objectives in their respective countries and regions;
- The launch of a Rapid Response Media Mechanism beginning with an online resource that will feature a list of global experts, who are available to comment and give media interviews, particularly in times of major cross-cultural crises;
- The debut of an On-line Clearinghouse on policies and projects related to Alliance of Civilizations objectives;
- The creation of a North-South network of private foundations and philanthropists;

- A consensus statement by diverse religious leaders committing to advance conflict resolution and to provide youth with guidance to counter extremist influences;
- The prioritization of cross-regional youth mobilization and exchanges to be supported by a newly-created Youth Solidarity Fund;
- The signing of partnership agreements and memoranda of understanding between the Alliance and major multilateral agencies and international organizations; and
- The establishment of an Alliance network of goodwill ambassadors made up of prominent, high-profile, internationally recognized figures drawn from the worlds of politics, culture, sport, business and entertainment to help in promoting the work of the Alliance, highlighting priority issues and drawing attention to its activities.

A third plenary panel held at the end of the Forum served to make the transition from the wide-ranging discussions held at the Forum to the mechanisms for implementation and action that are to follow in the coming months.

In his closing remarks, the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, President Jorge Sampaio, reviewed the main outcomes of the Forum, and committed to work with the members of the Alliance's Group of Friends community and the Alliance's many partner organizations to ensure follow-up on the ideas and project launches advanced at the Forum.

The following report presents the themes and outcomes of each session held at the Forum.

Introduction

The Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) was established in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. It aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism.

The first phase of the Alliance started with the creation by the UN Secretary-General of a High-level Group of 20 eminent personalities mandated to produce a report exploring the roots of polarization between cultures and societies worldwide and proposing practical recommendations to address this growing trend. The High-level Group presented its Report to Secretary-General Kofi Annan in November 2006.

In April 2007, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as High Representative for the Alliance. This marked the beginning of the second phase of the Alliance of Civilizations, with the development of an action-oriented implementation plan focusing on initiatives and projects in the areas of youth, media, education and migration.

The Alliance's focus on concrete initiatives was reinforced and consolidated at the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum, which was hosted by the Government of Spain on 15-16 January 2008. The Forum was a high-profile, action-oriented event which brought together a powerful network of political leaders, governments, international organizations, civil society groups, religious communities, as well as media and corporate leaders.

The Madrid Forum, which was attended by over 500 delegates, provided participants with a unique international platform to develop joint initiatives and forge partnerships. In addition to a High-level Political Debate attended by Ministers and other senior representatives of the Alliance of Civilizations' Group of Friends, the Forum featured announcements of major new initiatives and project-specific working sessions on a wide range of cross-cultural issues, including media literacy education, conflict prevention at the community level and the contribution of the corporate sector to promoting intercultural understanding. With more than one thousand journalists and media professionals attending the Forum, the event received widespread international coverage.

Opening Session

The Opening Session of the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum featured the President of the Government of Spain, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and the Prime Minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, as well as UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations President Jorge Sampaio.

President Zapatero and Prime Minister Erdoğan each announced ambitious national implementation strategies which outlined a range of initiatives and policies aimed at improving cross-cultural understanding and bridge-building. Both leaders called on UN member states to mobilize support and implement policies related to the four action areas of the Alliance of Civilizations – education, media, youth and migration – and to formulate national action plans to facilitate implementation.

The Alliance of Civilizations aspires to build bridges that can help us to manage the differences existing in the world, particularly those linked to religious or cultural issues.

H.E. Mr. José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero

The important element here is to ensure the optimal use of limited resources and to act with a spirit of serving humanity, rather than competition.

H.E. Mr. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan

Mr. Ban Ki-moon and President Jorge Sampaio expressed their hopes and aspirations for the outcomes of the Forum and the need to engage in constructive, solutions-oriented dialogue as part of the longer term work of the Alliance of Civilizations. The speakers stressed the need to involve multiple sectors and to make the work of the Alliance of Civilizations a joint effort, working with the media, business, academia, religious leaders and institutions, civil society, youth leaders, and opinion makers.

Never in our lifetime has there been a more desperate need for constructive and committed dialogue, among individuals, among communities, among cultures, among and between nations... As Secretary-General of the United Nations, my focus is on results. I am heartened to know that the Alliance of Civilizations is, too.

H.E. Mr. Ban Ki-moon

- *The Alliance of Civilizations is clearly the result of a shared political will directed at harmonising adequate action to confront cultural and religious problems and threats to security, stability and peace in the world.*

President Jorge Sampaio

Announcement: Silatech Youth Employment Initiative

Before Plenary Session I, H.H. Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned of Qatar announced a \$100 million investment in Silatech, a global youth employment initiative aimed at "connecting young people to each other, to capital, to industry, to opportunity."

By investing in our youth, we are investing in the security of our nations, and only secure and confident nations can build alliances based on mutual respect and common objectives... We have talked enough, now we have to take action.

H.H. Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned

The Silatech initiative, launched in cooperation with the World Bank and Cisco, will work with international and regional partners to create new jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities for youth. It will help connect young people to employment, provide business development services and promote small and medium-sized enterprises. The initial focus will be on youth in the Middle East and North Africa, a region with some of the highest youth unemployment rates in the world.

Plenary Session I

Managing Diversity in the Era of Globalization

Moderated by Ms. Ghida Fakhry-Khane of Al-Jazeera International, the first plenary panel sought to specify the true nature of the divisions that foment extremism and polarization between communities and how the Alliance of Civilizations could best contribute in practical terms to improving relations.

Dr. Javier Solana and Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik each asserted that the conflicts we witness today are about power and resources to a far greater extent than they are about religion and culture, but that the emergence of extremism and manipulation of ideas and ideologies within this context still poses a challenge to be addressed.

Mr. Bondevik went on to note that humiliation and desperation contribute to radicalizing people and that if people feel humiliated – by, for example, occupation, injustice, or persistent portrayals of their religion as inferior - they become desperate. He further contended that since religion and politics are interwoven in this discourse both internationally and at the local level, efforts in the area of interreligious dialogue to overcome the problems we are facing today should also include political leaders.

Drawing attention to the need to look at root causes as well as symptoms, Prime Minister Badawi of Malaysia, President Türk and Mr. Bondevik commented on the issue of Palestine as an area where the Alliance would face a particular political challenge and contended that a sense of despair combined with a lack of practical solutions would continue to discredit talk of human rights and equality.

In considering practical actions to be taken, Prime Minister Badawi and H.H. Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned of Qatar each placed primary emphasis on the need for improved education. Prime Minister Badawi highlighted in particular the importance of empowering women:

Women must be given access to education. Half of the Muslim population is women and we must empower women if we would like to succeed.

H.E. Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi

Sheikha Mozah asserted that quality education – including the teaching of citizenship, responsibility and civic initiative - must be a priority, not simply education for all, noting that people who are taught to be obedient are more likely to be influenced by extremists. Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura agreed on the importance of quality education, adding that non-formal education and teaching outside the school system also needed to be supported.

The panelists also urged a strong emphasis on human rights as foundational to any alliance across diverse communities. To this end, Ms. Mary Robinson suggested that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a “common standard of achievement for all nations and individuals”, and that the Alliance could help to reiterate and reformulate a common understanding of this foundation across differing contexts and a range of

settings. Building upon this, President Türk underlined the value of taking a comprehensive approach:

Let us develop the Alliance of Civilizations in two directions: one is to add the collective or identity element to the individualistic perception of human rights and (second) let us make this Alliance all inclusive and let us see all the problems [...] not only the most immediate and the most exciting issues of tension between Islam and the West

H.E. Dr. Danilo Türk

Mr. Enrique Iglesias, Secretary-General of the Ibero-American Secretariat and Mr. Ali Babacan, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, commented that integration and reconciliation between diverse groups are long-term processes that have taken place already in many different historical contexts, including, for example on the European continent and in Latin America. In the latter case, the successful outcomes of such processes can be observed through political developments, such as the election of a President of indigenous descent in Bolivia.

Above all, the panel stressed the importance of practical approaches and of taking the initiative:

Among us we have to solve the problems of the world. And among us we have to try to make this world a better place

Dr. Javier Solana Madriaga

Plenary Session I Panel

H. E. Mr. Ali Babacan
Minister of Foreign Affairs, Turkey

H. E. Mr. Abdullah Ahmad Badawi
Prime Minister, Malaysia

Mr. Kjell Magne Bondevik
Director, Oslo Center for Peace and Human Rights &
Former Prime Minister, Norway

Mr. Enrique Iglesias
Secretary-General, Ibero-American Secretariat

Mr. Koichiro Matsuura
Director General, UNESCO

H. H. Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned
Chair, Qatar Foundation for Education, Science
& Community Development

Ms. Mary Robinson, President, Realizing
Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative &
Former President, Ireland

Dr. Javier Solana Madriaga
Secretary-General, Council of the European
Union & High Representative, Common Foreign
& Security Policy

H. E. Dr. Danilo Türk
President, Slovenia

Announcement: Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund

Before Plenary Session II, HM Queen Noor of Jordan announced the launch of the Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund, which aims to promote, support and sustain media content that enhances mutual understanding and respect within and among different societies and cultures.

With a goal of establishing a \$100 million Fund, of which \$10 million has already been committed, she noted that the Fund “will support the production and distribution of films that entertain as well as enlighten – films that will enhance the connections that already exist between different societies, but are seldom noted on screen and in popular culture.”

Plenary Session II

Political Challenges to Building Cross-Cultural Understanding

Dr. Robin Niblett, Director of Chatham House, moderated the second plenary panel which featured various heads of state, members of government, civil society leaders, and public figures. Dr. Niblett initiated the discussion by asking whether there is, indeed, a so-called “Islam-West” divide. He suggested that the clash, as a polarizing force, resulted from efforts by those in power to appeal to peoples’ identity-based allegiances for the sake of political gain.

In reaction, speakers raised the relativity of this perspective from one region to another. Prime Minister Abdelaziz Belkhadem, President Abdoulaye Wade, and Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu all stressed that the problem is not so much one of “Western” and “Islamic” cultures, but rather of the imposition of political and economic models and plans from outside powers which disregard the sovereignty of nations. Speakers drew attention to the civilian cost of promoting democracy, and how continuous instability leads to even greater violations of human rights in conflict areas. These foreign impositions ultimately contribute to divisions and polarization between and within nations:

Forcing any model from outside does not really help develop democracy or peace or stability, on the contrary.

Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu

Further pursuing the theme of externally imposed processes, President Wade, in discussing Africa, said that the problem is not one of resources, but rather one of expertise, education, and training. He then stressed the need for partnerships of mutual respect between Africa and the global North:

The problem in Africa today is that we need to be listened to. Let us rule ourselves. Let us gather around a table and we will define together the conditions for cooperation.

H.E. Mr. Abdoulaye Wade

Others focused less on the fostering of cooperation than on the necessity of renewed political will, particularly in the West. Dr. Gareth Evans argued that the U.S. must elect leadership that will evenhandedly try to solve problems and advance the Middle East peace process and that the EU should recognize and embrace the potential of Turkey, while bringing more of its political and economic power to bear on advancing the Middle East peace process. He added that the “clash paradigm” had reinforced an unwillingness to place the requisite political will behind solving key conflicts, particularly in the Middle East. More than anything else, it has increasingly polarized people:

*The “clash paradigm” has no explanatory power, but it does have emotive power.
The language used has had its effect.*
Dr. Gareth Evans

Dr. Shirin Ebadi asserted that the “clash paradigm” had been created to serve political interests, particularly to fill the need for a new enemy after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. She observed that if the discourse of a clash benefited anyone, it was those selling weapons to conflicts areas.

Focusing on solutions, both Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos and Dr. Ali Alatas pointed to the need to acknowledge and address the broadly-held perception of double standards in how international laws and standards are applied. Foreign Minister Moratinos went on to suggest that while the Alliance of Civilizations was not in a position to resolve conflicts which would require political will and agreements, it could contribute to a culture of peace marked by greater understanding and respect between peoples. In terms of a strategy, he urged other countries to develop national and regional plans to further Alliance of Civilizations objectives.

In a similar spirit, President Tarja Halonen and Foreign Minister Micheline Calmy-Rey suggested that fostering new international, trans-regional, and cross-cultural cooperation that produced results would be the best way to build human security and advance basic human rights. On this note, and in answering the question of whether the European Union and its changing landscape of economic and political immigrants are perceived in any way as a threat, President Halonen responded:

I think that international cooperation is more of an opportunity than a risk, because at least for the smaller countries like my own (just 5 million), we cannot live just on our own up in the North. Cooperation is the way we can become richer and you can become richer.
H.E. Ms. Tarja Halonen

Plenary Session II Panel

Dr. Ali Alatas
Former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia

H. E. Mr. Abdelaziz Belkhadem
Prime Minister, Algeria

H. E. Ms. Micheline Calmy-Rey
Foreign Minister, Switzerland

Dr. Shirin Ebadi
Lawyer, Nobel Prize Laureate, Iran

Dr. Gareth Evans
President, International Crisis Group

H. E. Ms. Tarja Halonen
President, Republic of Finland

Dr. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu
Secretary General, Organization of the Islamic Conference

H. E. Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos
Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Spain

H. E. Mr. Abdoulaye Wade
President, Republic of Senegal

High-level Political Dialogue

Since its establishment in 2005, the Alliance of Civilizations has been supported in its role within the United Nations system and beyond by the Group of Friends (GoF), a community of UN member countries, UN agencies and other international organizations that have demonstrated an active interest in furthering the goals of the Alliance. Having more than doubled in size to over eighty members since the High Representative was appointed by the Secretary General in April 2007, the Group of Friends represents the primary mechanism for concerted political action and mobilization toward the objectives of the Alliance. During the first AoC Forum, a high-level political dialogue bringing together the Group of Friends community was convened. Over forty Ministers, (including 22 Foreign Ministers), Secretaries-General, and Directors-General of Group of Friends members participated in the session with the remainder of GoF members represented by parliamentarians, Ambassadors, senior policy-makers and advisors to Heads of State.

President Sampaio opened the session with a brief update on progress achieved since the Implementation Plan of the Alliance was launched in June 2007. He emphasized the results-based approach of the Alliance and the need for this focus to be reflected through practical action at national and local levels. In order to assure the long-term coherence and sustainability of the Alliance, President Sampaio stressed that the Alliance should develop strong international partnerships and strive to achieve progress in those areas where unity of purpose and unity of action can be achieved across diverse actors and stakeholders. He also stated that the work and activities of the Alliance should be further integrated into the UN system. Moreover, the Alliance's work would also be strengthened through the development of national and regional policies and initiatives. Regarding organizational matters, President Sampaio underlined the need for the Alliance to remain a light and effective structure. He added that contributions to the Voluntary Trust Fund for the Alliance are essential to its continued functioning and long-term viability.

Over the course of the high-level dialogue, strong support was expressed for the Alliance and its goals. The timeliness of the initiative was highlighted, given the increasing urgency of improving cross-cultural and inter-religious understanding in order to enhance international stability and expand human security and peace. Referring to the global context, participants pointed out that both political and economic factors were central to countering extremism and the polarization of cross-cultural relations. Several noted that without progress on specific conflicts – notably in the Middle East and most prominently in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – the impact of the Alliance would be limited while others emphasized the importance of addressing poverty and economic inequities.

Representatives of diverse states shared the steps that their governments were taking to foster tolerance and mutual respect between communities while countering the influence of extremists who exploit social, cultural and economic insecurities to advance exclusivist brands of identity politics. In this regard, some GoF members noted the challenge they face in striking a proper balance between “soft approaches” (education, exchanges, youth mobilization, etc.) that support increased cross-cultural understanding

on the one hand, and “hard approaches” required to police and combat violent extremism, including countering the influence of external support for extremist ideologies and groups on the other.

Because the Alliance is primarily concerned with “soft approaches”, participants focused on these, with several issues emerging over the course of the discussion as common areas of priority for diverse Group of Friends members. These included:

- celebrating diversity as a source of local, national and regional strength and vibrancy;
- focusing on “shared regional interests” through on-going regional dialogue and cooperation processes;
- expanding understanding and respect for diverse communities and cultures through education, exchanges, youth mobilization, and media; and
- seeking to establish a common framework for dialogue and cooperation by stressing the common principles of respect for human dignity and the values common to all as expressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

One of the themes that received greatest attention throughout the high-level dialogue was the place of religion and the role of religious leaders and communities in efforts to cultivate social cohesion within and across national boundaries. Three primary areas of focus emerged from the discussion of this theme reflecting action that some Group of Friends members are taking or encouraging others to take:

- fostering greater understanding and respect between religious communities by, for example, recognizing the value of – and in some cases facilitating the formation of - inter-religious councils as platforms for inter-religious dialogue, cooperative action, and peace-building among communities at both national and regional levels;
- expanding education to ensure a basic understanding of diverse religions and belief systems among general populations; and
- coming to terms with diverse perspectives on the relationship between religion and politics.

The discussion also focused on freedom of expression and the need to respect religious beliefs. The point was made several times that freedom of expression was a universal right which was to be promoted and protected, but that it needed to be exercised responsibly.

The practical initiatives launched during the Forum and mentioned by the High Representative in his opening remarks were all referenced during the high-level dialogue as welcome examples of dialogue leading to action. Multiple Group of Friends members urged the Alliance to maintain its demonstrated commitment to pragmatic approaches aimed at touching people’s lives in practical terms. To this end, a number of commitments as well as recommendations by Group of Friends members were put forward during the high-level dialogue. In particular, Bulgaria, New Zealand, Spain, and Turkey presented national strategies developed to advance the objectives of the Alliance

and foster greater cross-cultural understanding, in line with the recommendations contained in the AoC's High-level Group Report.

The high-level political dialogue session concluded with a commitment that the Alliance would seek to support Group of Friends members in their efforts to foster cross-cultural understanding within their own borders and regions; to facilitate information exchange and dissemination among them so that their efforts can increasingly benefit from being part of a collective response to the challenges of cross-cultural polarization that confront every region; and to further develop its own capacity as a facilitator and catalyst for pragmatic action toward these ends.

Finally, Turkey confirmed its intention to host the second Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations in 2009.

Working Session 1

Consolidating International Partnerships

Moderated by Mr. Jean-Christophe Bas, Development Policy Dialogue Manager at the World Bank, Working Session 1 brought together representatives from a range of multilateral agencies and international organizations to explore how to build on existing partnerships and to develop new ones.

Discussion

The Euro-Mediterranean region was highlighted as a region in which significant work is underway with several agencies (including UNESCO, ISESCO, ALECSO and the Council of Europe) already collaborating on a range of projects in the areas of youth and education.

Teaching about religion (or inter-religious education) was seen as a priority area. In that respect, OSCE's "Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools" were highlighted.

Participants emphasized the important role played both by youth and women in promoting intercultural relations both at grassroots and political levels. A greater voice should be given to both to maximize the impact of cross-cultural programs.

Universities and international student exchange programs were seen as key elements of any strategy aimed at promoting intercultural understanding. Greater efforts should be made to expand student exchange programs through university networks and international organizations in charge of developing and promoting these programs. In this context, the role of the Erasmus and Erasmus-Mundus programs were cited as models aimed not only at promoting student mobility, but also at building common values and a common sense of identity.

Others underlined the important role of cultural programs in promoting economic development. Such programs enjoy high rates of return and can help generate employment opportunities as well as economic benefits.

The role of tourism in bringing different cultures closer together was also emphasized. As a growing industry (in 2007, 900 million people crossed borders, marking a 5% growth in global tourism), tourism can contribute to building bridges among people from a diversity of backgrounds. The impact of tourism could be further increased by facilitating the movement of people and through the adoption of a global code of ethics.

Several participants underlined the importance of increased dialogue among international and multilateral institutions in charge of promoting cross-cultural understanding. There was also, according to some, a growing need for evaluating actions and past projects in this area of work in order to ensure that new initiatives are effective and lead to concrete results.

The fact that improving intercultural relations was seen as a priority was a source of concern for some, as it meant that little progress on intercultural dialogue had been achieved in the last decades. However, the current political interest in intercultural

dialogue was a source of encouragement, since it reflected an understanding that “soft power” policies in the areas of education, youth and media for example, were seen as an important element in efforts to promote global stability.

This change of paradigm was reflected in the attention the Alliance of Civilizations was receiving as a mobilizing force. It was important to remember, however, that the content for projects and initiatives was to be sought in a broad network of partnerships with international organizations that have already been operating in this field for some time. In that regard, UNESCO played an important role as a platform for international cooperation. A key aim of this cooperation was to promote “intercultural citizenship” and to support efforts to recognize each individual’s freedom to belong to several cultures.

Outcomes

Several organizations highlighted shared priority areas (including youth, education and media) and outlined concrete projects in which collaborative work could be developed. These include:

- As a step in the process of building the AoC Clearinghouse, UNDP suggested the development of a resource on cultural development programs in order to encourage exchange of best practices and expertise. The OSCE also highlighted a number of areas of potential collaboration, including the teaching of religions and beliefs in schools and the gathering of expertise and best practices on tolerance and cultural understanding (in this regard, the OSCE’s Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System – a clearinghouse of organizations and resources on tolerance and anti-discrimination policies – could prove to be a useful starting point).
- In the context of intercultural projects, the Council of Europe outlined a range of programs on which collaboration with the Alliance could be explored. These include: the training of youth leaders in intercultural skills; the promotion of human rights education; and city diplomacy programs. Several existing Council of Europe programs offer opportunities for joint work, including the CoE’s human rights education program, youth leadership training and the “Intercultural Cities” program.
- Regarding youth-related programs, the Commonwealth Secretariat stands ready to assist the AoC Secretariat in formulating and implementing youth-led projects in Commonwealth countries in the areas that have been identified – inter-cultural and religious exchanges; youth leadership training; and youth voices in the media.
- Concerning the organization of joint events, ISESCO reiterated its strong commitment to work with the Alliance of Civilizations and proposed to organize a conference around the AoC in 2008 with a view to establishing a concrete mechanism of collaboration with the AoC.
- UNESCO reiterated its commitment to collaborate with the AoC – using, as a starting point, the MoU that had just been signed.

Working Session 1 Participants

Mr. Amitav Banerji, Director and Head of the Office of the Commonwealth Secretary-General

Ms. Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Director General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport, Council of Europe

Ms. Jo-Anne Bishop, Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Programmes, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)

Dr. Hywel Ceri Jones, European Policy Adviser, Network of European Foundations

Dr. Wonil Cho, Executive Director, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

Mr. Abdoulaye Mar Dieye, Deputy Assistant Administrator and Deputy Regional Director, Regional Bureau for Arab States, UNDP

Dr. Lucio Guerrato, Executive Director, Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation

Mr. James Jennings, Representative of the Inter-Parliamentary Union

Professor Cândido Mendes, Secretary-General, Académie de la Latinité

H.E. Mr. Moustapha Niasse, Former Prime Minister of Senegal

Dr. Ahmed Said Ould Bah, Head of Cabinet, Office of the Secretary-General of ISESCO

Dr. Taleb Rifai, Deputy Secretary-General, World Tourism Organization

Dr. Nafis Sadik, Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General & Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for HIV/AIDS in Asia and the Pacific

Dr. Katérina Stenou, Director, Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue, UNESCO

Working Session 2

Building the AoC Clearinghouse: Media Literacy Education

Moderated by Dr. Pär Lundgren, Professor of Media and Communication at the University of Karlstad in Sweden, Working Session 2 brought together Media Literacy Education* experts from 21 countries representing a wide range of universities, media education, and media policy organizations from across the globe.

As the Alliance of Civilizations chose MLE as the subject for the first theme to be elaborated in its on-line Clearinghouse, the main purpose of Working Session 2 was to invite the assembled MLE experts and advocates to advise on how the Alliance could best develop this on-line resource to support a growing international MLE community of knowledge.

Discussion

The Working Session began with the introduction and demonstration of a live interactive navigation of the newly developed Clearinghouse website on MLE which was scheduled to open to all Internet users on the 15 February, 2008.

The MLE Clearinghouse is the first of a series of clearinghouse themes being launched by the Alliance of Civilizations, which aim to develop an international *community of knowledge*, providing exemplary best practice resources and serving as a research tool for users and practitioners in a range of key fields of work relevant to AoC's implementation plan.

The purpose of the MLE Clearinghouse is to become an open and inclusive resource providing information to interested individuals, institutions, policy-makers, and organizations. All registered users will be able to contribute to its development by uploading content, articles and information. The AoC is developing a network of partner organizations which will – jointly with the AoC Secretariat – become the administrators of the MLE-themed website.

Following the interactive live website demonstration, the session continued with presentations by five speakers who provided both overviews of the latest MLE initiatives and policies across diverse regions (Latin America, Asia, the Middle East, North America, and Europe) as well as highlights of uniquely innovative programs and/or far-reaching policies.

The presentations were followed by small group discussions in which participants and speakers debated the definition of MLE, exchanged information on best practices and

* Media Literacy Education (MLE) describes a broad variety of recently-developed pedagogical approaches that teach media consumers how to critically interpret the information they receive, taking into consideration the new cultures emerging from the Information Society. Some prefer the terms Media Education, Digital Literacy, News Literacy, or 21st Century Literacies.

discussed the relevance and optimal utility of the AoC's MLE clearinghouse. A number of participants in the session expressed an interest in partnering with one another through the AoC. These partnerships could be developed through the MLE on-line clearinghouse in order to further the process of sharing information and supporting cooperative action following the AoC Forum.

Outcomes

Based on the discussions of the working groups, as they were reported back to the main session, the following themes and conclusions were identified:

- There is an increasing number of organizations working in the MLE area and more resources and activities are being developed.
- Contextual differences between regions have given rise to a wide variety of approaches to MLE with emphases on different types of media varying from country to country.
- Technological divides are still preventing some parts of the world from engaging in online MLE debates and using web-based resources.
- Policy and curricula pertaining to MLE have been and are being developed in a variety of regions, but the level of development between regions is uneven. Civil society could play an important role in informing decision-makers and policy advisors on the latest developments in MLE policies in diverse regions.
- MLE should be part of citizenship education as it is part of a broader context of encouraging critical thinking in today's information society.
- There is a need to critically evaluate MLE in light of the work that has been achieved in this area over the last 20 years. This task is facilitated by an enhanced understanding of the media context developed through research and studies during this time.
- MLE audiences need to be defined and suitable resources and materials need to be made available to them.

Working Session 2 Speakers

Dr. Regina de Assis
MULTIRIO, Brazil

Dr. Agustín García Matilla
Universidad de Valladolid, Spain

Dr. C. K. Cheung
University of Hong Kong

Professor Samy Tayie
Cairo University, Egypt

Dr. Renée Hobbs
Temple University, USA

Working Session 3

The Role of Religious Leaders and Communities in Promoting Shared Security

Working Session 3 convened religious leaders from around the world to explore their role in promoting tolerance, shared security, and peace. *Shared security* moves beyond a conventional understanding of national and human security, and recognizes that human dignity (including the right to a decent life for everyone) lies at the heart of any effort to promote peace. Organized in partnership with Religions for Peace (RfP), this session continued RfP's ongoing efforts to advance multi-religious cooperation toward these goals. Moderated by Most Revd Dr. John O. Onaiyekan, Archbishop of Abuja, Nigeria, the session's participants included over fifty religious leaders, youth representatives, and civil society leaders.

Discussion

Over the course of the session, speakers and participants emphasized a series of important points to advance the shared security agenda. Specifically, they expressed the need to increase interaction between religious leaders and politicians. While religious leaders continue to engage each other in dialogue, it is often politicians who make substantive decisions that can create or mitigate conflicts. Politicians also need to be held accountable for discrepancies between their rhetoric and their actions.

The vast majority of people are not aware that religious leaders assemble in this way. It is important to raise the profile and visibility of exchanges such as this one. But the issue at hand is more than a matter of public relations. The misperception that religion is the root cause of violence needs to be dispelled. Engaging voices that represent the peaceful, mainstream of religions is essential, as ignoring them allows extremists to fill the void left by their absence. Thus, religious leaders have a necessary role in the promotion of shared security. In that respect, it was suggested that a future theme for the AoC Clearinghouse should be the collection of best practices in the engagement by religious leaders and communities of other key sectors, including the corporate, political, and media sectors for the purposes of advancing development, humanitarian action, and positive social change.

Participants also recognized that to expand shared security, disparities in income, allocation of resources, and various other inequities also need to be addressed. The dynamics of globalization have further cemented many of these problems. Shared security cannot be achieved without working toward global justice. Engagement from multiple sectors and stakeholders is thus necessary to make progress.

Women are particularly affected by extremism. Even though women are often the subject of debates on religious identity, they are severely underrepresented in these discussions,

as a great majority of religious leaders are men. This also allows extremists to scapegoat women. A concerted effort needs to be made to increase women's involvement in religious programs. More women need to be placed in positions of religious leadership.

Youth representing religious organizations made an intervention (see appendix) challenging and urging religious leaders to take action on four fronts:

1. Inter-religious dialogue at the local level should be considered as important as inter-religious dialogue at the global level;
2. Learning respect for other religions and faiths should be a necessary part of religious education;
3. Religious minorities within countries should be allowed to exercise their right to religious freedom without being discriminated against or suppressed; and
4. People should be empowered to counter and publicly debate with members of religious communities who inspire fear or disdain for other religions.

Outcomes

A statement committing the assembled religious leaders to action in key areas was accepted by acclamation during the session. Salient commitments in the statement included the following:

- Use multi-religious dialogue to discern deeply held and widely shared values that can provide platforms for multi-religious action in service of the common good
- Provide youth with genuine opportunities for religiously based service to the common good, as an alternative to what is offered to them by religious extremists
- Welcome opportunities for new female leadership and assert that religious women be fully mainstreamed into the leadership of religious efforts to advance multi-stakeholder cooperation for the common good
- Engage the media to raise the visibility of multi-religious dialogue and cooperation in building peace and promoting the common good.

Working Session 3 Speakers

Ms. Karen Armstrong
Author, United Kingdom

Dr. Azza Karam
UN Fund for Population Activities

Mr. Juan Fernando López Aguilar
Former Minister of Justice, Spain

Prof Dr. Din Syamsuddin
President, Central Board of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia

Sheikh Tayseer al-Tamimi
Head of the High Legal Court and of the Supreme Council for Religious Adjudication in Palestine

His Holiness Abune Paulos
Patriarch, Ethiopian Orthodox Church, Ethiopia

Rabbi David Rosen
Chairman, International Jewish Committee for Interreligious Consultations; American Jewish Committee, Israel

Working Session 4

Innovative Uses of Mass Media to Promote Cross-Cultural Understanding

Working Session 4, moderated by Ms. Mary Robinson, Founder and President of Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative, convened media professionals from TV, newspaper, film and radio, as well as nonprofit organizations working with media and foundations and philanthropists interested in supporting media for social change. The session also included presentations by some of the principal supporters of the Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund, including H.M. Queen Noor who made closing comments related to the Fund.

Discussion

While the media is often perceived as having a distorting and negative impact on relations between cultures, participants focused on the power of media to recognize unifying elements within peoples' cultures and religions, spark conversations, inspire people to action, and support conflict resolution efforts.

Participants discussed several differing but complementary strategies aimed at using the media as an effective tool to enlighten people about different cultures and to inspire collective action towards building cross-cultural bridges. The role of both documentaries and entertainment media was discussed. For instance, Just Vision's *Encounter Point* and Participant Productions' *An Inconvenient Truth* illustrate vividly how documentaries can raise public awareness and encourage changes of attitude by triggering global conversations about key issues the world is facing today. Entertainment media and feature films could also be effective agents of change by highlighting important social and political issues as backdrops to narratives with which viewers could engage.

The Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund was presented and discussed in detail as an initiative that uses the compelling power of media in order to generate more balanced and constructive perceptions of minorities. The research on which the initiative is based shows that self-perceptions of minorities are deeply affected by media images portraying acts of violence committed against the group they identify with. The aim of the AoC Media Fund is to support productions that promote positive images of minorities and to provide platforms for their widespread dissemination. It was noted that the AoC Media Fund was a non-profit venture and that income generated by Fund-supported productions would be reinvested into the Fund.

There was a great deal of support for the Media Fund and related initiatives. Some participants pointed out that, given the scarcity of resources in this field, partnerships were crucial if progress was to be achieved. Others noted that, in some cases, mainstream, commercially viable productions were not necessarily the most effective channel through which to generate social change. Experience showed, for example, that in many African countries – where radio is often the primary mechanism for mass communication – smaller scale, locally produced soap operas and reality shows were

more likely to achieve broad impact and contribute to conflict resolution. Such productions, however, were not usually commercially viable and needed financial support.

The impact of media on young people was also the focus of much attention. Many participants emphasized the urgent need to provide positive messages to the young. All too often, the media focused on negative issues that were not at the core of young people's concerns. Therefore, efforts should be made to give young people media platforms to have their voices heard and to concentrate on issues that are of central interest to them, such as employment, women's role in society and combating racism and intolerance.

It was also argued that young people responded positively to role models. Rock stars – such as Indonesia's Ahmad Dhani - and other celebrities carrying a strong message in support of tolerance and mutual understanding could wield a great deal of influence among young people. Humor could also play an important role in achieving shifts in opinion. *Aliens in America* was a good example of how humor could help address hostility against Muslims.

Outcomes:

Suggestions were made to

- Use the media to respond quickly to crises using timely, topical, and strategic approaches and messages. Participants stressed the need to amplify the voices of those in favor of an “alliance”, and counter those who are insisting that there is an inevitable “clash”;
- Develop films that both entertain and also enlighten and address difficult issues;
- Empower youth to tell their stories at the local level;
- Develop strategic partnerships between media organizations and organizations that can provide educational outreach to youth and to particular target populations, such as decision makers;
- Develop media projects to share the stories of people in regions around the world that are not often told and to highlight initiatives that are successfully creating alliances locally, regionally, or internationally. Whether small or large scale initiatives, such projects could be produced with modest capacity at the local level and then distributed broadly;
- Develop commercially viable narratives that can educate large numbers of people about cultures that they are unfamiliar with or about issues that require greater public awareness;
- Turn to Asia and Southeast Asia to highlight additional models of coexistence beyond the West-Middle East focus;
- Specific suggestions were also made for the AoC Media Fund to:
 - Develop both content and skills (train people to network with one another internationally)
 - Develop and disseminate a strategic plan for their work
 - Integrate youth in the selection and development of stories

Working Session 4 Speakers

Ms. Julia Bacha

Film producer and Media Director,
Just Vision

Mr. Omar Amanat

Co-Founder, Groundswell Productions and Board
Member of the AoC Media Fund

Ms. Susan Collin Marks

Executive Vice President, Search for Common
Ground

Mr. Amr Khaled

Broadcaster Executive Editor, New York Times

Mr. James Berk

CEO, Participant Productions

Working Session 5

Youth Approaches to Intercultural & Inter-religious Dialogue

Working Session 5 brought together leaders of non-governmental organizations and youth participants nominated by a number of youth partner networks that cooperated with the AoC Secretariat to identify youth leaders for the Forum: the Commonwealth, the Council of Europe, the International Coordination Meeting of Youth Organizations (ICMYO), the Islamic Conference Youth Forum (ICYF-DC) and UNESCO. H.H. Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned also participated actively throughout the session. The session was dedicated to discussing best practices as well as challenges and opportunities for intercultural and interreligious leadership training and exchanges. It was organized entirely in working group format with resource persons from non-governmental organizations acting as facilitators and providing insights into projects and initiatives aimed at promoting intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Towards the end of the session, a number of observations and suggestions were presented by youth from the working groups.

Global youth movements have skills for dialogue - dialogue for understanding

Youth participant

Discussion

Participants agreed that conferences and international events offered good networking opportunities, allowing youth to meet face to face and get to know each other's work. Experiencing multicultural encounters offered new perspectives to youth who participated in them. However, even though international meetings allowed youth to establish networks and platforms for joint projects and partnerships, there was a need to complement these efforts with external guidelines and action. Follow-up was deemed of utmost importance.

Many participants made the point that young people needed to be included directly in decision-making processes, and should have a chance to share their own experience at international meetings and create practical project proposals. Access to information about projects, funding and possible joint ventures was also regarded as key.

Moreover, many participants stressed the need to overcome obstacles to youth travel, such as visa restrictions and lack of financial resources. There was also an urgent need to explore ways of reaching young people who are not present at international meetings. Given the high costs involved in face-to-face exchanges, other options for interaction should be explored involving the use of new technologies. In that context, the digital divide needed to be tackled urgently: not all youth organizations have access to technology and efforts should be made to extend internet access.

Youth exchange programs were seen as effective tools for promoting intercultural understanding. Participants were of the opinion that more money needed to be committed to increase the number of exchange programs and to deepen their content. Exchanges should not only be about the experience of meeting people and cultures, but also about *achieving* something together.

More generally, widening education opportunities was highlighted as one of the key priorities. Access to quality education and gainful employment still posed major challenges to the world's young people. Serious attention and efforts needed to be invested in these areas. The Silatech youth employment initiative announced at the Forum was enthusiastically welcomed in that regard.

Exchanges need to have follow-up; people need to make use of their knowledge and to share knowledge with others.

Youth participant

Outcomes

- An AoC web-based resource should be created to share information about existing projects, including contact information to facilitate networking.
- In addition to involving youth in international events and in concrete youth-led projects, the AoC should promote the expansion of international student exchanges to become a standard component of education.
- Providing funding should be accompanied by proper evaluation to make sure that the project goals achieved can be taken forward.
- The UN and all its agencies should better coordinate their efforts in the youth area.

Working Session 5 Facilitators

Mr. Mark Evans

Director, Connecting Cultures

Dr. Eboo Patel

Executive Director, Interfaith Youth Core

Ms. Shira Loewenberg

Director, Outward Bound Centre for Peace

Ms. Inaya Wahid

Founder, the Positive Movement

Mr. Tyler Norris

Executive Director, Abraham Path Initiative

Mr. Lucas Welch

President, Soliya

Youth Orientation Session Partner Organizations and Speakers/Facilitators

Partner organizations:

Mr. Ralf-Rene Weingartner, Director of Youth and Sport, Council of Europe
Ms. Elise Auvachez, Section for Youth, Sport & Physical Education, UNESCO
Mr. Diogo Pinto, President, European Youth Forum
Mr. Elshad Iskandarov, Secretary General, Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation
Mr. Rajkumar Bidla, Youth Affairs Division, Commonwealth Secretariat

Speakers/Facilitators (speaking and then facilitating working groups):

Mr. Amr Khaled (speaker) and Mr. Shaukat Warriach (facilitator), RightStart Foundation
Mr. Derrick Ashong, Director of Business Development, Weapons of Mass Entertainment
Mr. Ricken Patel, Executive Director, Avaaz.org
Mr. John Marks, President, Search for Common Ground
Ms. Sharese Bullock, Strategic Partnerships & Marketing, ListenUp!

Working Session 6

Conflict Prevention, Religion and Politics at the Community Level

Working Session 6 convened experts and practitioners in the fields of conflict prevention, religion, and politics. The focus of the session was to move beyond theoretical discussions of a ‘clash’ to practical recommendations and best practices in the field of conflict prevention. Moderated by Mr. Oliver McTernan, the session included representatives from multiple sectors – such as members of national governments, religious and political decision-makers, and representatives from civil society and the international community.

Discussion

Participants stressed that the use of religious language to describe conflicts prevents accurate analyses of the underlying political issues. Yet, while political and economic factors are most often the catalysts in creating conflict, many populations view and interpret the world around them – including conflicts - through the lens of their religious belief.

For this reason, the religious dimension of conflicts needs to be taken into consideration, and religious leaders need to be engaged at local, national, and regional levels. There also needs to be greater interaction between religious leaders and politicians. Between different faith communities, a language of shared values is starting to develop. This can be the basis for greater interaction on shared concerns.

Participants noted that to have effective dialogue that leads to peace, all parties in a conflict need to be invited to the table. While this is recognized as a principle of conflict resolution, it is not acted on, whether it is in Israel-Palestine or in the unwillingness of various governments to talk to Islamists. In the case of the latter, it is important to recognize that there is a significant segment of Islamists that is not extremist, and needs to be engaged in dialogue.

Dialogue must move beyond nominal exchanges. It is important to listen earnestly and carefully, particularly to those who disagree with one most. The ultimate purpose of dialogue is not to convert the other side to one’s views, but to address its concerns. One of the biggest challenges in dialogue is that even in private interactions, leaders are not willing to be bold and open, and the established order is constantly given a free pass.

All politics are local, and all grievances need to be addressed at the local level without anyone’s exclusion. The court systems in many countries are slow to act, which is why it is important to involve local leaders in the process of addressing grievances. Local communities also have a role to play in becoming early warning systems, as they are on the ground and able to witness firsthand escalations in any conflict. For

effective peace building, people need to feel the dividends of peacemaking at the local level. This encourages them to actively participate in the peacemaking process and feel empowered.

One of the biggest challenges in engaging ‘Muslim’ and ‘Western’ societies is the rise of “Islamophobia”. Constantly, Muslims and Islam are on the defensive. The point of departure for discussions on Islam is often that it is not a violent religion. In the non-Muslim world it is thought that it is the responsibility of mainstream Muslims to differentiate themselves from extremists. The non-Muslim world also has a part to play in actively differentiating between the religion and acts of terror.

Stereotyping is often a product of intended ignorance. There are resources being constantly deployed to spread disinformation and misperceptions of others. This can be described as an industry of ignorance. To counter this, it was proposed that a *human right to be understood* should be promoted as a mutual obligation for all societies and cultures. Additionally, education around this right should be incorporated into school curricula and textbooks, such that it can become the basis of interaction between cultures and societies.

Several participants felt that unless the Alliance seeks to address in some way the issue of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it will not meet its objectives. It was argued that the focus must remain on resolving the conflict, rather than simply “managing” its effects. Without a genuine attempt at reaching a negotiated solution, the situation on the ground would continue to fluctuate between live conflict and dormant “peace process” with no hope of a resolution. Participants also argued that the significant power differential between the two sides of the conflict needed to be acknowledged.. At the same time, the point was made that internecine fighting in Palestine needed to be addressed in order to reach a long-term resolution to the conflict.

Outcomes

Suggestions were made to

- Ensure that dialogues bring every stakeholder in a conflict to the table, particularly when it comes to Israel-Palestine.
- Convene fora where open exchanges between politicians and religious leaders can take place. Many politicians who are involved in policy-making are not adequately informed on basic religious issues.
- Increase engagement between various sectors and religious leaders through a clearinghouse that documents best practices of religious leaders engaging governments, civil society, the media, and politicians.
- Develop systems of education and reform for religious leaders, particularly in areas where problematic interpretations of religion are being applied.

- Empower local community and religious leaders as well as politicians so that they are able to address local grievances more promptly, as recourse to the court systems delays this process significantly.
- Make local communities and community leaders part of an early warning system of escalating tensions in both conflict and non-conflict situations.
- Use language at the official level in Western governments that does not conflate the religion of Islam with criminal acts of terror.
- Help create a multi-religious infrastructure that works at the local, regional, and global levels to allow religious communities to address their concerns in the language of shared values.
- Incorporate the ‘human right to be understood’ in school curricula around the world as a useful pedagogical tool to prevent stereotyping among and between communities.

Working Session 6 Speakers

Prince Turki al-Feisal

Chairman, King Feisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies, Saudi Arabia

Dr. André Azoulay

Adviser to HM King Mohamed VI of Morocco

Dr. Eliseo Mercado

Chair, National Peace Council , Philippines

Professor John Esposito

Founder and Director, Prince Alwaleed Bin-Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University

Working Session 7

Rapid Response Media Mechanism

Working Session 7 brought together media professionals – editors, producers and journalists – to collect feedback about the Alliance of Civilizations Rapid Response Media Mechanism (RRMM), an initiative aimed at supporting the work of media professionals by connecting them with leading experts and analysts who can comment on intercultural issues, particularly in times of crisis. The session was also aimed at developing a community of support for the RRMM among these professionals and to seek their insights about the challenges faced by the media in covering conflicts and cross-cultural issues. The session was moderated by Riz Khan of Al Jazeera International, and President Halonen of Finland also participated actively in the discussions.[†]

Discussion

Participants expressed strong support for the Rapid Response Media Mechanism, underlining the fact that such a tool could be valuable when reporting on potentially divisive cross-cultural stories. It was generally recognized that the media played an important role in shaping stories on intercultural issues and that polarizing views were sometimes more likely to make the news than opinions that seek to calm tensions.

Some welcomed the RRMM initiative precisely because religion had become one of the forefront issues in news coverage. Because of this, the need for balanced views on religious-related matters was greater than ever. The upcoming crisis surrounding the Geert Wilders film about the Koran in Holland showed the need for a tool such as the RRMM.

The wider context in which cross-cultural crises arise was deemed very important. Several participants pointed out that the lack of progress in resolving long standing conflicts constituted the backdrop for many cross-cultural crises and for the increasing polarization between Western and Muslim societies. In this context, the RRMM could be a useful tool, but it should not be seen as a substitute for political action and it should not be used to hide the fact that the ultimate responsibility for addressing the root causes of polarization is in the hands of political leadership.

In a similar vein, it was argued that the tendency to over-interpret conflicts in a cultural frame carried the danger of somewhat ignoring the political roots of the issues involved. The fundamental issues surrounding cross-cultural tensions were deemed to be political and our effort to explain tensions in cultural terms sometimes made us incapable of recognizing the real sources of conflict. In parallel to a Rapid Response Media

[†] Shortly following President Halonen's participation, Finland initiated the development of its own Rapid Response Media Mechanism.

Mechanism, there is a need to work through the socio-political and historical roots of conflicts – a process that is necessarily slow and needs to be pursued in the long-term.

Others emphasized the limitations of the RRMM by pointing out that it could do little to help reduce inter-cultural conflicts on a local or national basis. For people “sitting on the fault lines” of local conflicts or suffering from the impact of tensions between rival ethnic and political groups, the main issue was to have their voices heard and to ensure the reality on the ground was reported faithfully by the media. The RRMM might be a useful tool to help reduce cross-cultural tensions at a global level, but its impact on local conflicts will be limited – though presumably RRMM-type models implemented at more national and local levels could more effectively reach this level of impact. The RRMM should not restrict itself to giving a platform to voices of the establishment and those who analyze conflicts from a distance; rather, it should focus on bringing to the fore the viewpoints of those who are experiencing conflict situations on the ground.

Moreover, in order to be effective, the RRMM needs to be a balanced resource, which includes a diversity of opinion-makers. This is all the more important that this resource should not be seen as an attempt by the Alliance or the UN to “tell journalists how to do their jobs”. In this regard, some pointed out that the job of journalists is not to reduce polarization, but to produce balanced views on complex issues.

Participants also stressed the importance of building off of existing efforts and networks – for instance the resource of 180 Palestinian and Israeli commentators and experts on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict created by JustVision, whose aims converge with those of the Alliance.

Outcomes

Participants expressed support for the RRMM and provided insights, ideas and feedback that will be useful for the second phase of the project’s implementation:

- Support was expressed for the Global Experts Finder (GEF) – an online resource being developed as part of the RRMM. It was highlighted that, in order to be effective, this resource would have to allow journalists to contact relevant experts almost immediately.
- The need was stressed by participants that the online resource should be interdisciplinary and diverse, including a plurality of independent voices. It was also suggested that the GEF should include quotes and links to experts’ publications.
- The tool could be very valuable inasmuch as it allows journalists to produce balanced views about a particular issue. It is important that the Alliance does not attempt, through this resource, to “shape messages”: the GEF should simply assist journalists in their work.
- Media training should also be provided to experts included in the resource. It was noted that the name “Rapid Response Media Mechanism” could be misinterpreted and that its military connotations did not convey adequately the aims of the resource.

- Participants also welcomed the idea of forming an online group where these issues could be further discussed. In particular, it was suggested that an “early warning network” of partners be created to provide monitoring of cross-cultural tensions worldwide.

Working Session 7 Speakers

Ms. Stefanie Bolzen

Foreign Correspondent, Die Welt, Germany

Professor Gema Martín Muñoz

Director, Arab House, Spain

Mr. David Gardner

Foreign Correspondent, Financial Times, UK

Dr. Lawrence Pintak

Director, Center for Electronic Journalism, Egypt

Mr. Hameed Haroon

Owner, Dawn News

Mr. Baher Kamal

IPS Director for the Middle East, Inter Press Service

Mr. David Michaelis

Director of Current Affairs, link TV

Working Session 8

Engaging the Corporate Sector in the Alliance of Civilizations

Working Session 8, organized in partnership with the UN Global Compact and Club de Excelencia en Sostenibilidad, brought together business leaders – primarily Chief Executive Officers and Senior Vice-Presidents – from around the world to discuss the role of corporations in contributing to promote cross-cultural understanding. Moderated by Mr. Aldo Olcese, from the Spanish Royal Academy of Economic and Financial Sciences, the session had three main goals:

- to help engage the corporate sector in the work of the Alliance of Civilizations;
- to collect ideas and suggestions for potential business sector partnerships and corporate strategies aimed at promoting cultural diversity; and
- to share examples of best practices.

The speakers shared with the group their own companies' experiences and best practices regarding corporate policies that take into consideration and support cultural diversity in their workforce, sustainable growth, environmental awareness and community-based outreach that develops and supports local programs.

Discussion

The following observations and recommendations were made:

- Many western multinationals make substantial strategic investments in culturally diverse countries with extraordinary growth potential in multiple sectors related to infrastructure, health, education and housing needs. These sectors represent consumer markets of millions of human beings who seek a better quality of life.
- Most of the world's natural resources are in countries with a great need for social stability. Investing in local programs and human resources in these countries would benefit the local community, the country as well as the corporate sector.
- Economies can only develop within a context of stability. Companies could play a crucial role in achieving and maintaining peace and social equality. They should be engines of development and social justice, especially since they often operate in countries whose economies are smaller than their own (95 of the 150 largest economies in the world are not countries, but multinationals).
- The corporate sector must recognize its responsibility and develop business initiatives that take into consideration sustainable and ecologically viable solutions to concrete local challenges. They should develop strategies to structurally enrich the countries in which they are operating.

- Successful contemporary business models are those that embrace and promote diversity within their managerial staff and workforce in general.
- The business world offers a relevant context for the promotion of intercultural understanding and diversity. The strengthening of these factors can produce greater financial benefits as well as greater stability, and mutual support among different sectors.
- Collaboration between corporations and governments is essential in order to ensure a sustainable work place and a social environment in which the principles of equality, diversity, ethical behaviour, good governance, transparency, and social justice will develop and expand in the future. All these are fundamental elements of social cohesion and are essential to economic development and strong democratic systems.

Outcomes

- The UN Global Compact committed to publish a book on best practices of corporations promoting and supporting diversity, cross-cultural initiatives, and sustainable growth as a first step towards setting international standards as well as a concrete outcome of the working session.
- Participants recommended that corporations and governments work in collaboration and jointly commit to the development of Corporate Social Responsibility principles.
- Additional recommendations are highlighted in the document “La Responsabilidad Social de la Empresa. Propuesta para una nueva economía de la Empresa Responsable y Sostenible” (Corporate Social Responsibility. Proposal for a new economy of responsible and sustainable companies) that Spain’s Royal Academy of Financial and Economics Sciences shared with the group.

Working Session 8 Speakers

Mr. Ferdinando Beccalli-Falco
President & CEO, General Electric International,
USA

Mr. André Fourié
CEO, National Business Initiative,
South Africa

Ms. Meriem Bensalah
CEO, Les Eaux Minérales d’Oulmès, Morocco

Mr. José Ignacio Goirigolzarri
CEO, BBVA, Spain

Mr. Antonio Brufau
CEO, Repsol YPF, Spain

Mr. Moustapha Koç
Chairman, Koç Holding, Turkey

Mr. Fulvio Conti
CEO, ENEL, Italy

International Foundation Working Group Breakfast

Approximately 25 individuals representing foundations, foundation networks, and operating foundations from around the world participated in a morning session to discuss the development of a network of foundations concerned with building cross-cultural understanding, decreasing polarization and fostering tolerance, openness and collaboration. Moderated by Mr. Iqbal Riza, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General for the Alliance of Civilizations, and Ms. Nadia Roumani, Senior Advisor at the Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat, the session aimed to identify ways in which the AoC Secretariat can provide assistance and information to foundations working on AoC-related themes around the world.

Discussion

The session provided a unique opportunity for participants to meet colleagues developing and funding related initiatives, share information about their respective programs, and identify common areas of work.

The discussion revealed that foundations providing funding in AoC priority areas are few in number, but that there has been increasing interest in supporting initiatives aimed at improving intercultural and interreligious relations, especially in the context of Muslim and non-Muslim societies. There was also an interest in funding projects related to intra-Muslim issues. Participants highlighted the current dynamism in the field of philanthropy, especially in the Middle East and Asia. A recently-completed report by the John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement at the American University in Cairo states that institutionalized giving in the Middle East is reaching a tipping point, although many challenges still confront organizations working in this field.

The following thematic areas emerged repeatedly during participants' description of their respective areas work:

- a. intercultural/interreligious dialogue;
- b. education and translation;
- c. arts and media; and
- d. role of religious leaders in peacebuilding efforts.

One of the key points that emerged from the discussion was the need to develop a network aimed at helping foundations to exchange information, share best practices, interact with experts, and address common challenges to advance their work in promoting cross-cultural understanding. Participants stressed that such a network would help them in particular to:

- Share information about organizations funding work related to AoC priority areas (intercultural/interreligious dialogue; media that informs and enlightens; youth-focused initiatives that increase understanding and tolerance; projects focused on the integration and participation of minority communities).
- Share information on good practices and common challenges.
- Identify independent credible partners.
- Share research findings from commissioned papers and internal research.
- Share different approaches and strategies used by foundations.
- Increase collaboration among complementary initiatives, especially across regions.

In addition, participants made the following suggestions for the network:

- Identify particular issues that it will address each year. A few participants stressed the need to collaboratively develop a few larger scale initiatives, leveraging their respective resources.
- Ensure that the role of women is mainstreamed into the AoC thematic areas.
- Respond quickly in the event of a possible national/regional/global conflict, stressing the unique role that foundations can play in mobilizing resources to address such incidents.
- Explore the development of subgroups that focus on the above-mentioned thematic areas (intercultural/interreligious dialogue; education and translation; arts and media; role of religious leaders), allowing participants to enter into deeper levels of discussion and engagement.

Outcomes

On the basis of this discussion, the main outcome of the session was agreement for the need to develop a network facilitated by the AoC Secretariat that would provide a unique vehicle for ongoing communication among foundations that could help identify knowledge and information gaps.

In order to support the development of this network, the AoC Secretariat agreed to:

- Continue to define the network (including fine-tuning the criteria for participation in the network), and identifying additional participants.
- Co-host two regional meetings in the Middle East and Asia in 2008 to expand the network and to increase the regional input into the network's development.
- Complete the mapping exercise of foundations funding areas related to AoC priority themes, and distribute the findings to the working group's participants.
- Develop an online space for the network's participants.

International Foundation Working Group Breakfast Participants

Ms. Muna Abu Sulaiman

Executive Manager, Strategic Studies, Kingdom Holding Corporation

Dr. Saif Ali Al-Hajari

Vice Chairman, Qatar Foundation

Mr. Omar Amanat

Co-Founder, Groundswell Productions
Board Member, AoC Media Fund

Ms. Betsy Fader

Director, Strategy and Planning, Doris Duke Charitable Foundation

Mr. Simon Xavier Gerrand-Hermes

Chairman, Guerrand-Hermes Foundation for Peace

Dr. Vartan Gregorian

President, Carnegie Corporation

Dr. Barbara Ibrahim

Director, John D. Gerhart Center for Philanthropy and Civic Engagement, American University in Cairo

Mr. Hywel Ceri Jones

Director, Network of European Foundations

Dr. Tom Kessinger

General Manager, The Aga Khan Foundation

Mr. James Kidner

Director, The Coexist Foundation

Mr. John Kiser

Chairman, William and Mary Greve Foundation

Mr. Firoz Ladak

Executive Director, The Edmond & Benjamin de Rothschild Foundations

Dr. Soliman Abdul Moneim

Director, Arab Thought Foundation

Ms. Kavita Ramdas

President & CEO, Global Fund for Women

Mr. Felipe Gómez-Pallete Rivas

Director General, Fundación Amancio Ortega

Mr. Suhail Rizvi

Chairman, Rizvi Traverse Management
Board Member, UN AoC Media Fund

Mr. Jorge Segrelles

Director Gerente, Fundación Repsol YPF

Ms. Joan Spero

President, Doris Duke Charitable Fund

Mr. Holland Taylor

Founder, LibForAll Foundation

Dr. Hillary Weisner

Director, Islam Initiative
Carnegie Corporation

Mr. Emilio Rui Vilar

President of the Board of Trustees, Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

Breakfast with members of the former High-level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations

On the first day of the Forum, a breakfast was held with members of the former High-level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations and President Jorge Sampaio, High Representative of the Alliance. President Sampaio briefed participants on the work achieved by the Alliance since his appointment in April 2007, and shared his views about forthcoming challenges and the Alliance's strategic outlook.

Some members of the former High-level Group enquired about the place of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the AoC's overall strategy and stressed that, in their view, action by the Alliance to help address this issue was essential. President Sampaio stated that this issue was, indeed, in the scope of work of the Alliance and that he was dedicating his attention to it. At the same time the need to expand and consolidate broad-based political support for the Alliance and to ensure the pragmatic orientation of its implementation phase were the primary challenges to which he had dedicated his first few months as High Representative. In this regard, the Forum marked an important turning point, as it would demonstrate both the expanding political support for the Alliance and the action-orientation of the initiative.

The High Representative circulated a concept paper on the establishment of a network of AoC Ambassadors and invited members of the former High-level Group to become AoC Ambassadors. Their role would be to help highlight the work of the Alliance in their region, as well as promote links between the AoC and potential partners working in the area of cross-cultural understanding. All members of the former HLG who were present at the breakfast accepted President Sampaio's invitation to become AoC Ambassadors.

Plenary Session III

From Global Talk to Local Action

Plenary Session III of the Forum aimed at shifting the focus from the dialogue and generation of ideas of the previous day and a half toward consideration of the practical modalities through which action could be taken. Specifically, the Session addressed the issue of city diplomacy, prioritized as one of four main fields of action by the High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations, and on the role of mayors and cultural figures in connecting local perspectives and action with global dialogue. The panel, moderated by Dr. Kadir Topbaş, Mayor of Istanbul, consisted of several mayors from the Euro-Mediterranean region, as well as prominent authors with a passion for their cities.

The panelists shared a common vision that modern cities, which are increasingly multicultural, are places where various identities and multiple values can be brought together, where cultures meet and learn from each other and, as suggested by Mr. Alberto Ruíz-Gallardón, mayor of Madrid, “where the mix of cultures has a chance of survival.”

Participants asserted that cultural diversity needed to be seen, not as a problem to be solved, but as a source of common enrichment. Supporting a positive approach to diversity, Ms. Rosa Aguilar, mayor of Córdoba, emphasized that being tolerant towards others and creating a new form of citizenship based on diversity and respect for human rights were the great collective challenges of our time.

During the session, mayors questioned the supreme role of national governments and their potential to bring about tangible improvements to people’s lives. They agreed that states alone cannot generate change. Rather, we need to look at the positive role that civil society and local authorities can play. For instance, local schools – where children are taught about the need for tolerance and mutual understanding – and local youth clubs – where they interact and learn about other cultures – are critical instruments of mobilization. Involving a few dedicated individuals within a certain community could have a very empowering and positively transforming impact on the whole neighborhood, in contrast to actions generated exclusively at the level of national leadership.

Moreover, it would also be a great mistake to ignore the role of local religious leaders, as people are influenced by messages they are presented with at their local church, mosque, synagogue, or temple. Therefore, it is essential for the Alliance to involve local religious leaders in order to achieve its goals.

“Cultural diversity is something to be enjoyed. It is not a problem. The problem is ignorance. It is ignorance that provides the fuel for fear, prejudice and hate.”

Mr. Terry Davis, Secretary-General of the Council of Europe

The mayors who participated in this session highlighted how cities can join forces, in order to facilitate dialogue, exchanges and even conflict resolution between large groups of people through city diplomacy initiatives. Through such collaboration, cities can play a

leadership role in moving away from a culture of violence towards a culture of tolerance and peace. Cities can play an active role in supporting the goals of the Alliance of Civilizations by helping to promote equal rights and opportunities for all. As suggested by Mr. Jordi Hereu, mayor of Barcelona, and Mr. Bertrand Delanoë, mayor of Paris, the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) can, through the Memorandum of Understanding it has signed with the Alliance, play a significant role in that regard, and help deliver practical results.

The panelists elaborated on their experiences of working within and between cities to promote intercultural understanding. They highlighted initiatives involving partnerships between several cities from various countries and agreed that, along with common approaches cities might share, each city has to look for its own model as well. Indeed, the impact of youth exchanges and cultural exchanges should not be underestimated and should be prioritized by the Alliance.

During the discussion on global versus local levels of action, mayors were unanimous regarding the essential role of the latter. Global and national strategies need to be implemented at the local level through agreements with local governments. Mayors and cultural personalities can play a significant role in drawing attention to local issues and concerns at a global level and vice versa; together with civil society actors, mayors can give a voice and a face to the local dimension at international meetings, while at the same time bring global strategies on peaceful co-existence to bear at the local level through targeted action. As Dr. Kadir Topbaş stated, peace and security at a global level can only be achieved through human-centered policies and services at a local level.

“If we develop dialogue among individuals from different civilizations and plurality of multicultural backgrounds at the level of the local governments, then we will have a much better chance to develop dialogue of civilizations at the global scale”.

Alberto Ruíz-Gallardón, Mayor of Madrid

One of the central issues that was discussed during this Plenary was the role of the Alliance of Civilizations. As emphasized by Mr. Paulo Coelho and mutually supported by other panelists, the Alliance has a great potential to translate high-level dialogue down to the local level of actions in order that it may become “a project of humanity”. Noted Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, the significance of the Alliance is in its potential capacity to help inspire and reinforce in the hearts of human beings the possibility that civilizations “can actually coexist in complementarity, not in destruction, denial and disdain”.

While mapping the future steps forward for the Alliance, Professor Federico Mayor agreed that building a shared identity in which differences are respected and perceived as a source of common enrichment, would be among the first priority. In addition, there is a need for a strategy on how to deal with intolerance, prejudice, and conflicts; such a strategy would bring justice and ensure that people’s basic human rights are always guaranteed, as suggested by Dr. Abdel Azeem Wazir, mayor of Cairo.

Plenary Session III Panel

Ms. Rosa Aguilar
Mayor of Córdoba, Spain

Mr. Paulo Coelho
Author, Brazil

Mr. Terry Davis
Secretary-General, Council of Europe

Mr. Bertrand Delanoë
Mayor of Paris

Mr. Jordi Hereu
Mayor of Barcelona, Spain

Mr. Alberto Ruiz Gallardón
Mayor of Madrid, Spain

Mr. Wole Soyinka
Author and Nobel Laureate, Nigeria

Dr. Kadir Topbaş
Mayor of Istanbul, Turkey

Professor Federico Mayor Zaragoza
President, Culture of Peace Foundation, Spain

Dr. Abdel Azim Wazir
Mayor of Cairo, Egypt

Closing Session

First Alliance of Civilizations Forum

The High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, President Jorge Sampaio, closed the Forum by providing an overview of the main themes, conclusions and outcomes achieved.

President Sampaio recalled that the three main objectives of the Forum were:

- to profile the event as a key gathering, providing space for dialogue among a wide range of social and political actors, including political leaders, heads of international and multilateral bodies, religious leaders, as well as corporate sector, media, youth and civil society representatives;
- to brand the Forum as a results-oriented event – an international platform for launching innovative projects and building new partnerships; and
- to enhance the profile of the Alliance by showcasing the strong commitment of its members to turn its political objectives into “glocal” deliverables.

President Sampaio then outlined the major outcomes of the Forum:

- Announcement of a **Global Youth Employment Initiative**, called **Silatech**, with an investment of \$100 million from H.H. Sheikha Mozah Bint Nasser Al-Missned and partnerships with the World Bank and the corporate sector, notably with CISCO, which will begin with 5 pilot country programs in the Middle East.
- Announcement of a multi-million dollar **Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund** that will be a first-of-its-kind nonprofit large-scale media production company focused on normalizing images of stereotyped communities and minorities in mass media through partnerships with major Hollywood production, distribution, and talent management companies. The Fund was launched with an initial commitment of 10\$ million, and an estimated target of \$100 million.
- **Announcement of national and regional strategies** for cross-cultural dialogue by governments and multilateral organizations to advance AoC objectives in their respective countries and regions.
- **Discussions at the policymaking level** that highlight the importance to move the Alliance forward in 2008 such as: developing joint multi-stakeholders initiatives at the regional level aimed at promoting a better inter-cultural understanding, and preventing the mounting of tensions and the rise of extremism; contributing to the upgrade of inter-cultural dialogue, namely among the two banks of the Mediterranean Sea; launching a number of activities within the framework of city diplomacy.
- **Establishment of partnership agreements**, with various multilateral agencies and organizations, which contain specific terms that will enable the AoC to leverage networks, contacts, and competitive advantages of partners in the implementation of its programs. Five agreements have been signed – with

UNESCO, the League of Arab States, ISESCO, ALECSO and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) – and a letter of intent with the Council of Europe.

- **Launch of the AoC Clearinghouse beginning with the theme of Media Literacy Education**, which will catalogue media literacy programs and related government policies in different parts of the world and announcements of partnerships with 18 universities that will serve as nodes to enliven this clearinghouse by initiating exchanges and posting materials on the latest developments in media literacy education.
- **Launch of a Rapid Response Media Mechanism** beginning with an online resource that will feature a list of global experts in cross-cultural issues, who are available to comment or to talk to journalists, particularly in times of major cross-cultural crises.
- **Establishment of a Youth Solidarity Fund** aimed at providing grants to support youth-led programs in the areas of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Moreover, a decision was made to strengthen the network of youth participants that attended the AoC Forum and broaden the network to include other youth.
- **Creation of a global network of philanthropic foundations and private funders**, which will share information; raise awareness of ongoing initiatives, identify mutual needs; and explore ways to leverage existing resources for greatest impact.
- **Establishment of an Alliance network of good will ambassadors** made up of prominent, high-profile, internationally recognized figures drawn from the worlds of politics, culture, sport, business and entertainment to help in promoting the work of the Alliance, highlighting priority issues and drawing attention to its activities.
- **Commitment by the United Nations Global Compact to produce a publication** aimed at raising the visibility of **best practices in the corporate sector** toward supporting cross-cultural relations.
- **Adoption of an action-oriented statement of solidarity and joint commitment by diverse religious leaders** toward providing youth with guidance to counter extremist influence, promoting a sense of shared security in their various constituencies, and elevating the role of women in future religious projects.

President Sampaio concluded his remarks by recalling that the Forum had generated new commitments and partnerships. It had also provided a voice for young people involved in creating cross-cultural exchange programs. By showing that it could mobilize high level and high profile commitments and galvanize support from governments, particularly Group of Friends members, as well as from the corporate sector, international organizations and civil society, the Alliance demonstrated that it was a unique example of the way in which the UN could adapt to emerging challenges. Indeed, the Alliance could be an important element of the UN's preventive diplomacy efforts.

President Sampaio concluded by stating that much needed to be achieved in the year leading up to the next AoC Forum in Istanbul in 2009, but was reassured by the strong coalition of partners that had been formed around the Alliance.

So many responsibilities ahead of us show that the Alliance is the right initiative at the right moment. Urgent action is needed to stop further degradation of the human atmosphere. Let's keep united and firm in our certainty that we can change the world.

President Jorge Sampaio