

Check against delivery

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*Building multidimensional partnerships
on the intercultural dialogue*

*Lisbon,
June, 23, 2007*

Mrs Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe

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Mr Claude Frey, President of the Executive Committee of the North-South Centre

Excellencies

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear Friends

- Let me start by just greet and welcome you all in Lisbon. As a former Mayor of this town, I am indeed very happy that this meeting takes place here for different reasons.
- But mainly because I do think that Lisbon is a particularly inspiring place to discuss cultural diversity related issues.
- In this regard, let me recall a clever little book on Lisbon, *Requiem*, by an Italian writer, Antonio Tabucchi, where through the narrator's memories of the past in an empty summer day in Lisbon, the novel turns on the question of diversity and cultural identity... that is indeed a nice homage to our white city and probably also an interesting reading for you all!
- Secondly, let me thank you so much for the opportunity given to me to address this distinguished audience. I am very happy that I can share with you some thoughts on the important issues you are going to discuss during these two days.
- But before entering into details, I would like to underline my personal appreciation of the invaluable, intensive and consistent work developed by the Council of Europe over the last 50 years to ensure promotion of common fundamental values and protection of human dignity.

- Observing the diversity of our societies in terms of ethnicity, culture, languages and religions and wishing to preserve their multicultural nature, the Council of Europe has been paying increased attention to intercultural problems and related issues.
- In my view, this is a very positive evolution since for ensuring an effective implementation of the Council of Europe core values in our globalized and open societies we need to take into account cultural diversity, we need to promote it and protect it.
- This is not an easy question but rather a very demanding and challenging one. There is no point in hiding our current difficulties.
- On the one hand, human rights as codified in international legal instruments being universal should be the basis to build up peace, security and stability and to promote pluralism and cultural diversity; but, on the other hand, this same human rights *acquis* is overshadowed by rampant criticism, conflict and extremism.
- Therefore, important efforts are desperately needed in order to strengthening the international recognition, protection and implementation of cultural rights or rights with a cultural dimension as part of the core fundamental rights and to better incorporating them in civil, political, economic and social rights.
- I would like to stress that the cultural dimension is a fundamental part of modern democracies and citizenship. As our societies are becoming increasingly mobile because of migrations as well as open and global because of the new information and communication technologies, cultural diversity is a main feature of our times.

- This means that identity questions are nowadays much more critical in our societies as well as tolerance, mutual respect and pluralism are major political challenges for our democracies.
- I have noticed that the Council of Europe is fully aware of these major changes of our times. It is very stimulating to realize that in the last years “the intercultural dialogue” has been put at the top of its political agenda and has become a political priority.
- Let me congratulate you on this important progress. In this regard, allow me to welcome the Council of Europe’s initiative of presenting a “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” by the end of this year, which will set out the Organisation’s main policy orientations in this field.
- I do think that it will be an extremely useful tool providing policy makers and practitioners at national, regional and local levels with the guidelines and tools for promoting intercultural dialogue.
- I also would like to underline the innovative path followed to draft this White Paper. This is not just a mere question of method. Instead I am sure that it will have a major impact on the output, on the scope and quality of and guidelines for action and proposals to be made, as they will be based on a comprehensive, open and inclusive consultation of all stakeholders in intercultural dialogue.
- As part of this consultation, let me turn now to the Alliance of Civilizations.
- Firstly, a very brief introduction on this initiative.
- As you might know, the Alliance of Civilizations was launched by the Secretary General of the United Nations in 2004 on the co-sponsorship of the Prime Minister of Spain and Turkey.

- To guide this initiative the Secretary General has established a High-level Group of 20 eminent people to explore the roots of polarization between societies and cultures today, and to propose concrete solutions to address the issue.
- The High-level Group submitted its Report (on line on www.unAoC.org) to the Secretary-General in November 2006 in Turkey.
- The Report puts forward a range of concrete and practical recommendations focusing on the four main areas of action: media, youth, education and migration.
- In line with these suggestions, the new Secretary-General of the UN, Mr Ban Ki Moon, appointed me as his High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations.
- Based on the recommendations included in the Report, I have just presented to Secretary General, last 14 June, an Implementation Plan of the Alliance for the next two years.
- You do not need to have a suspicious mind to find yourselves thinking about the utility of this new initiative! I must confess I was also quite puzzled by this question.
- What is the Alliance for? What it is not for? These are preliminary important questions to be clarified from the very beginning in order to avoid misunderstandings.

- First of all, as I see it, the Alliance is about building bridges between societies, promoting dialogue and understanding and forging collective political will to address the world's imbalances, tensions and sources of conflict. Therefore, the Alliance has a very broad scope and it is, first and foremost, a global initiative.
- Secondly, cross-cultural dialogue is an essential yet insufficient means toward the Alliance goals. What is required is practical action that can make a difference in people's lives and that can influence people's worldviews. Under this perspective, the Alliance can play an important role in building partnerships with key players at the levels of government, international agencies, civil society and the private sector to bring about such change. Exploring opportunities for such partnership will be one of my key priorities in the coming months.
- Therefore, the Alliance intends to work in close collaboration with all its partners, both within and outside the UN system. It is not intended to compete let alone to replace other initiatives.
- Thirdly, the Alliance incorporates a fundamental political dimension and it is intended to shape a wide political consensus around a series of practical proposals to counter the increasing polarisation of perceptions and collective attitudes as well as the rise in extremism.
- In this regard, I see my own role as a facilitator and my action will tend to promote awareness that stability and peace in the world at the long term require intercultural dialogue, political dialogue, inter-religious dialogue as well as pluralism, tolerance and mutual respect.
- After having made this brief presentation of the Alliance, let me now turn to your consultation document preparing the "White Paper on intercultural dialogue".

- Question 33 asks “How can the Council of Europe contribute to the “Alliance of Civilizations” initiative of the United Nations ?
- A question 33 bis could ask “How can the Alliance of Civilizations contribute to the Council of Europe initiatives on intercultural dialogue”?
- This is to stress that we are looking for building true partnerships, a two-way relationship or even better a multidimensional network of relationships.
- The Council of Europe along with the European Union are the main European pillars of the Alliance.
- Of course it is worth underscoring that the Alliance will have a global scope underpinned by a universal perspective. That is why it will pay special attention to international organizations that are part of the UN family such as the UNESCO. But placing a priority on addressing the relations between Western and predominantly Muslim societies, the Council of Europe, the European Union and the OSCE will be main institutional partners of the Alliance as well as the Arab League, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and their affiliated institutions will be our main gates to the Muslim world .
- For the most part, the Alliance will seek to support your projects, acting as a catalyst and a convener, helping to build partnerships and expand existing initiatives.
- We will seek to enhance coordination efforts and cooperation as well as to increase the visibility and impact of these activities, avoiding redundancies or even contradictions.
- In this framework, allow me to make three suggestions:

- firstly, let me tell you that one of the projects of the Alliance will focus on the development of a clearinghouse of knowledge and materials about regional cooperation frameworks and successful cross-cultural projects.
- The clearinghouse is intended to be a practical tool for governments, organizations, and institutions interested in launching projects related to the promotion of cross-cultural understanding. The clearinghouse will be user-friendly, offering summaries, links to organizations, examples, and ways to obtain more detailed information.
- Themes to be included in the clearinghouse include: regional fora for interfaith and intercultural dialogue and cooperation; media literacy programs; training programs for journalists in cross-cultural news coverage; curricula for teaching about religions; and human rights education programs.
- I do count on the Council of Europe participation and active collaboration in this project!
- Secondly, we will organize the first annual Forum of the Alliance, next January.
- The AoC Annual Forum will be the annual flagship event that convenes representatives from states, international organizations, civil society, media, and funding agencies.
- Its objectives will be to consolidate and increase partners' commitment to the objectives of the Alliance and strengthen commitment to its work; create opportunities for advocacy, profile raising and social mobilization; and review progress on the implementation of the AoC's program of action.

- I would like to invite the Council of Europe to present the main results of the White Paper on intercultural dialogue in this Forum and to launch a broad discussion of some of its proposals in order to give cultural diversity a more positive connotation that it has today and a more positive role in building inclusive societies.

- Thirdly, and this is an invitation for all of you here present representing different international organizations and entities: let's seize the opportunity of the Forum to which you are all invited to hold a first meeting on how to collaborate in future joint activities regarding the four fields of action of the alliance – education, youth, media and migrations; on how to launch a joint program on one or several of these fields of action; on how to unite our efforts in order to bridge divides.

Dear Friends

- As the High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations, I will do my best to help shaping a wide political consensus around a series of practical proposals to counter the increasing polarisation of perceptions and collective attitudes as well as the rise in extremism.

- I will seek to promote awareness that international security, stability and peace depend very much on cultural, religious and political dialogue, pluralism and mutual respect.

- Intercultural dialogue is indeed primordial. But it does not replace the need for political solutions for political problems. Education for all and youth policies based on equal opportunities, economic development, social cohesion, democratic

societies, pluralism and inclusive citizenship are main political aims to be achieved through political means.

- Religion can not be replaced by politics neither politics by religion. The political public space should be used for political purposes and action. Cultures and religions, intercultural and inter-faith dialogue should be encouraged as a shared goal.
- I am personally convinced that Human Rights are the best framework to promote human dignity within multicultural inclusive societies. I am also convinced that democracy and rule of law are the best way for guarantee peace and harmony in pluralistic societies. I am nevertheless also persuaded that protection of cultural values and religious beliefs have to be incorporated in the hard core of common fundamental as a way to prevent conflicts, to defuse tensions and protect democracies.
- New strategies to manage and promote intercultural and inter-faith dialogue, based on universal human rights, should be developed and that is why I do think that your participation in the consultation process leading to the White Paper is most useful. That is why also I do hope that the Alliance can contribute to give additional visibility and political clout to its forthcoming recommendations on new policies and initiatives to be taken forward.

Many thanks and good work