



**Alliance of Civilizations  
Group of Friends Meeting**

***New York, 10 March 2011***

**Summary Report**

At the invitation of the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, President Sampaio, and under his chairmanship, the Group of Friends (GoF) held its first 2011 meeting at the level of Heads of Missions on 10 March, New York, in the presence of H.E. Dr. Khalid bin Mohamed Al Attiyah, Minister of International Cooperation of Qatar. H.E. Ms. Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, and H.E. Mr. Abulaziz Altwaijri, Director General of ISESCO, also attended the meeting and shared their views on existing and desirable synergies.

The draft annotated agenda circulated ahead of the meeting included three main items:

- The proposed framework for preparing the Doha Forum and connected activities (Civil Society consultation and Focal Points thematic meeting).
- The new context and the development of new initiatives in 2011, in addition to the ongoing programs and activities.
- The Replenishment Mechanism and the first Voluntary Replenishment Session.

Furthermore, the High Representative had invited the GoF members to reflect on the impact of ongoing changes in some Arab countries on the UNAOC's mission and goals and on possible additional actions in that region.

**Opening remarks**

Having welcomed all the participants, the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, President Jorge Sampaio, first drew attention to the changes sweeping through a number of Arab countries. He referred to the early months of the Portuguese democratic transition, suggesting that exchanges on experiences by others in transition processes can be most valuable. In the current circumstances, the Action Plan for the Mediterranean was gaining added relevance. It should now be implemented as a matter of priority. A number of key projects had already been selected for priority implementation. Countries were invited to share any additional suggestions until March 18 before the draft Action Plan is finalized and circulated to delegations.

Turning to the Doha Forum, President Sampaio expressed his deep appreciation for Qatar's commitment to prepare a Forum that will have a long-term impact. The linkage between the missions of the Alliance and the Millennium Development Goals, as discussed with HH Sheikha Mozah, is a challenging opportunity for the Alliance to reach a turning point. GoF members will be kept closely informed.

Commenting on the financial situation, which remains a concern, the High Representative announced the first Replenishment Session to be hosted by Turkey in October 2011 and called for an enlargement of the donors' community and a longer term commitment. Discussions under way in OECD to include the Alliance among ODA – Eligible international organizations should also be an important step contributing for an increased participation in the UNAOC Trust Fund from countries.

Furthermore he shared some encouraging developments: the creation with BMW of a joint Award for Intercultural Understanding, the Summer School sessions in cooperation with Malta and Montenegro, the Media event in Cairo, the preparation of a Regional Strategy for Latin America, progress on the thematic platform on bridging the divide in the field of humanitarianism and international cooperation.

H.E. Dr. Khalid bin Mohamed Al Attiyah, Minister of International Cooperation of Qatar stressed the commitment of Qatar to contribute to the advancement of the Alliance's goals in a sustainable way. The Doha Forum (11 – 13 December, 2011) should be a landmark in that respect. Close cooperation is being developed with the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey and the High Representative. HH Sheikha Mozah and President Sampaio have agreed to provide the Alliance with an enhanced framework, linking the Alliance's mission to the MDGs' agenda. Ongoing work to prepare that new approach, on which the Doha Forum will focus, is progressing well, with the help of top experts, who prepare concept papers in the four areas of work. For the first time ever, a civil society pre-forum will be held in early May 2011. The opportunity will be used to strengthen links with the Arab civil society and to empower existing Human Rights bodies in the region to develop new projects in the areas of Human Rights education, dialogue and tolerance. All members of the GOF are invited to attend the meeting of Focal Points, organized at the same time (May 2, 2011), with a focus on National Action Plans. These Plans have shown their relevance and they may help us set targets.

The Ambassadors of the two sponsor countries welcomed the preparatory work toward the Doha Forum, which will help link the Alliance with the broader UN agenda. They also underlined that the meeting was particularly timely, in the light of ongoing changes in a number of Arab countries. In the words of Ambassador Juan Pablo de Laiglesia of Spain, the Alliance provides inspiring references and tools, which may help promote transition toward more pluralistic societies. Ambassador Apakan of Turkey underlined the diversity of situations in the Arab world, calling for a specific attention, while insisting that the quest for democracy is in line with the objectives of the Alliance. Both stressed that the Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean offers an excellent basis for action, only awaiting a funding commitment from the GoF countries. The Ambassador of Spain also commended developments on new National and Regional Action Plans and Strategies. He further announced that Spain and Italy would organize an international seminar on religious freedoms in June in Florence. The Ambassador of Turkey further commended the role of the Alliance in addressing radicalization. He called on members to rise to the challenge of the Alliance's sustainability and announced Turkey's intention to organize the first Replenishment session. Both sponsors described efforts toward holding of an interactive thematic debate in the UN General Assembly on Youth and intercultural dialogue.

#### **Highlights of the discussion:**

About 30 delegations contributed to the discussion, many of them expressing their appreciation and gratitude to the High Representative for his leadership and to the sponsors for their steady support.

In the following short summary, positions expressed are not attributed to individual delegations, except under item 5, dealing with initiatives and achievements at regional and national levels.

#### **1. Developments in a number of Arab countries, members of the Group of Friends**

Many delegations referred to the "winds of change" in those countries, which were generally viewed as underscoring the aspirations people have in common, beyond their differences, and underlining the universal values upon which dialogue among all can be strengthened. Changes come from grass-

roots; progress is shaped by the will of the people. Building on the demands for democracy of so many, the Alliance can help reinforce trust and respect for diversity, promote social cohesion and peaceful partnerships in the Mediterranean. It has a unique opportunity to advance its “spirit” and a culture of democracy. It must act as an honest broker. The Alliance should be ready to help the countries concerned make their transition in a manner that strengthens diversity and improves cross-cultural relations. Yet, while cooperation is welcome, it must respect the wish of the people and the specific circumstances of each country; national ownership of the democratic transition, in particular by youth, is crucial. Also, one should not forget that in times of big changes, some groups retain an interest to fuel tensions; we should redouble efforts to support dialogue.

The suggestion of the High Representative that implementing the Regional Action Plan for the Mediterranean has now become an urgent priority drew widespread approval. We need to make the Mediterranean Strategy work. This demands vision, will and commitment. Some delegations expressed a readiness to help, possibly also on the resource side. The High Representative reiterated that any specific proposal to help implement the most relevant activities would be welcome until March 18.

Two delegations encouraged closer partnership with UNESCO in the circumstances. Pointing to the power of new media in the recent developments, one delegation suggested that the Secretariat should explore how to better use them in carrying out its own mission. Initiatives taken by individual countries in the context of the Mediterranean Strategy are reflected in the last section of this summary report.

## **2. The proposed framework for the Doha Forum and connected activities**

Most interventions paid tribute to Qatar’s commitment to the preparation of the next Forum. The decision made to develop a linkage between the aims of the Alliance and the Millennium Development Goals was well received and found workable. The link was an innovative approach, which will benefit both processes. It should be reflected in the Doha Declaration. The link between intercultural and inter-religious dialogue and the MDGs had already been made in a Resolution tabled by the Philippines and Pakistan. One delegation also recommended to start looking beyond the 2015 horizon.

Similarly, the announcement of a pre-Forum civil society event in May received broad support. Particular attention should be paid to appropriate participation from the Arab world and from developing countries. Civil society actors were key drivers for change and cross-cultural cooperation. They should all be involved in a process of dialogue. Faith-based initiatives should also be included.

The Focal Points thematic meeting was mentioned with an interest by several interlocutors, with two delegations suggesting that it rather takes place after the Civil Society Event.

## **3. The development of new initiatives in 2011, in addition to the ongoing programs and activities**

All delegations taking the floor commented on aspects of the letter of January 15, 2011 from the High Representative to Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Heads of International Organizations, members of the Group of Friends.

Several of them underlined the importance of National Action Plans and Regional Strategies, beyond the specific comments made about the relevance of the Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean in the current circumstances. One delegation suggested studying more closely the contribution made so far by National Action Plans to achieving the goals of the Alliance and how they could help reach agreed targets in the future.

The work on Regional Strategy for Latin America and the interest of Ethiopia in an African Regional Initiative were commended. These Regional Strategies may serve as a catalyst for action in Asia, which confronts strong migratory movements and needs to develop more positive attitudes toward migrants. The welcome engagement for Regional Strategies should however not undermine the importance of National Action Plans. The useful role played by the Thematic Platforms, including through a recent meeting in Bern of the Humanitarian Platform, was also underscored.

The Alliance was encouraged to further develop work in support of Human Rights and pluralism. Several ambassadors stressed the need to step up efforts addressing intolerance on religious grounds and announced national initiatives, reflected in the last section of this document. One country insisted that the Alliance should also be a platform for religious dialogue and suggested that a separate roundtable be devoted to that issue in Doha. Initiatives such as Plural+ designed to improve public information and education about the contribution of migrants to the host societies were also welcome. The critical role played by free Media was again underscored and the Alliance was encouraged to further develop activities in that area.

One delegation insisted on an overall coherence in further developing the programs of the Alliance and the need to respect the diversity of intercultural challenges and opportunities, keeping in mind that the religious factor is only one dimension. The role of the AOC in respect of inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue is rather to help create the right conditions. The initiative proposed by the High Representative for reconciling diversity and social cohesion in Europe was welcome by some of the interested partners. The International Organizations present confirmed their interest in further developing existing cooperation and developing better synergies.

#### **4. The Replenishment Mechanism**

Several delegations echoed the appeal launched by the High Representative for broadening a circle of contributors and recalled their own contributions, some time very recent, to the funding of the Alliance. The announcement of a first Replenishment Session in the autumn in Istanbul was broadly welcomed. One delegation encouraged the Secretariat to help establish the right procedures and instruments, including on budget planning.

#### **5. Announcement of initiatives and achievements**

In the course of the debate, many delegations referred to initiatives taken at national and regional levels to support the goals of the Alliance. Some recalled their specific involvement in Alliance programs and projects. These comments may be summarized as follows:

Spain will build on its experience relating to religious diversity and tolerance in convening with Italy in Florence (June 13 – 14) an international seminar on “Religious freedom: human rights, social inclusion and political participation”. Together with Turkey, Spain also works toward the organization in June of an interactive thematic debate of the General Assembly on the role of Youth in fostering cross-cultural understanding.

Turkey will organize the First Replenishment Session of the Trust Fund and is working together with Spain on an interactive thematic debate in the UN General Assembly.

UNESCO is looking forward to strengthening cooperation with the Alliance under the recently signed MOU. This autumn it organizes its 7<sup>th</sup> Youth Forum and will be pleased if the AOC actively participates.

ISESCO is actively involved in cooperation with both the Alliance and UNESCO in the pursuit of the Alliance's goals.

Austria supports and hosts the Conference of European Imams, thus helping develop a responsible religious leadership. The country will also continue to support the annual Arab-European Young Leaders Forum. Austria looks forward to hosting the Vienna Forum in 2013 and to learn from Qatar in that respect.

Belgium, which recently pledged 40,000 EURO to the RRMM Program, has established since 2008 National Roundtables on Intercultural Relations. They will be presented in the meetings in May 2011.

Portugal has taken an initiative in the EU context for new approaches in policies concerning the South Mediterranean and the Arab World. They rest on a reinforced regional multilateralism, of which the Alliance is part.

IOM is an active co-sponsor of the online community on migration and integration and of the Plural+ Program.

Finland is a standing contributor to the Trust Fund, with a particular interest in Youth activities.

OIC is keen to enlarge cooperation with the Alliance, in particular, in addressing intolerance and discrimination on accounts of religion. It took successful initiatives during the recent Interfaith Harmony Week. It would welcome a continuation of the work of the Roundtable on Islamophobia, held during the Rio Forum.

Serbia prepares a new biannual National Action Plan. The country also prepares a Model UN exercise for the Balkans, in the context of the Alliance and of the Year of Youth. Serbia stands ready to help implement the two Regional Strategies and Action Plans to which it is a party.

Luxembourg, which provides steady funding and regular political backing at the Ministerial level, will support the initiative of the High Representative on reconciling diversity and cohesion within the EU space.

BSEC: in October 2010, Ministers of Tourism from BSEC countries expressed commitment to enhance cooperation and launch projects in the field of cultural tourism. BSEC actively develops projects in the field of education and research, as well as youth, which could be major areas of interest for both the AOC and BSEC to strengthen their future cooperation.

Brazil remains committed after the Rio Forum, through standing political backing at the top, a new contribution of 100,000 USD, a support to the work on a Regional Strategy for Latin America and the strengthening of links between Latin America and Arab countries on issues relevant to the Alliance.

Slovenia recently organized a seminar on History Teaching, which is relevant to the SEE Regional Strategy.

The European Union welcomes the High Representative's initiative on reconciling diversity and cohesion in the EU space and stands ready to help implement the Mediterranean Strategy.

Hungary will organize in June a conference on "European approaches to cultural diversity: questions and answers", with an emphasis on the Balkans.

Montenegro will develop its Summer Diplomatic School in the context of the Regional Strategies, as part of the Alliance Summer School concept.

Bulgaria is currently reviewing its second National Action Plan.

Afghanistan is placing efforts to build a consensus for the future peaceful development of the country, with full respect for human rights, in the context of the Alliance objectives. The country recently made a symbolic contribution to the Trust Fund.

Switzerland recently organized a successful meeting of the Humanitarian Platform. It continues to support the Secretariat through seconding one staff.

Peru is holding the second meeting for the preparation of a Regional Strategy for Latin America and prepares its National Action Plan.

Bosnia and Herzegovina stays committed to implement the Regional Strategy for SEE, which the country critically helped develop.

The Russian Federation is currently working on its third National Action Plan and intends to strengthen support for Global Expert and Dialogue Café.

Argentina is actively involved in the drafting of the Regional Strategy for Latin America, with a concern to build on the existing regional cooperation and to develop synergies with National Action Plans.

Malta will organize a Summer School, focusing on education for intercultural skills and youth exchanges with students from North Africa, the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and Malta. It will be part of the Mediterranean Strategy.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia considers building in 2011 on positive experiences made in 2010 with the Second World Conference on Dialogue among Religions and Civilizations (Ohrid) and the South East Gathering of Youth.