



Statement by His Excellency Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser
UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations
At the Fifth Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations

“Promoting Responsible Leadership in Diversity and Dialogue”

Vienna, 27 February 2013

Your Excellency Mr. Heinz Fischer, The Federal President of Austria.

Your Highness, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, The Emir of the State of Qatar.

Your Excellency, Mr. Ragab Tayep Erdogan, The Prime Minister of Turkey.

Your Excellency, Mr. Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo, The Foreign Minister of Spain

Your Excellency, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General.

Your Excellency, Mr. Vuc Jeremic, President of the UN General Assembly.

Your Excellency, Mr. Jorge Sampaio, Outgoing UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations.

Your Excellency, Mr. Michael Spindelegger, Vice Chancellor and Federal Minister for European & International Affairs.

Your Excellencies Heads of State and Government.

Dear colleagues and friends,

It is a great honor for me, in my capacity as High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations, to address this Forum of the Alliance in this beautiful Vienna.

I wish to thank the Austrian Government for hosting this Forum which will always have an emotional connotation for me, since it is here that I begin my tenure as High Representative.

I would like to express my ***gratitude*** to Member States – in particular Spain, Turkey, and Qatar – and to the Secretary General, Mr. Ban Ki-moon, for their trust.

The Secretary General's support for the Alliance, as particularly his five year plan, is of great significance, and I look forward to working with him again in my new capacity as High Representative.

I wish to extend my gratitude to my country, the State of Qatar, under the ***leadership*** of His Highness the Emir, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, for their trust in me and their support without which I would not be where I am today.

My special thanks go to Her Highness Sheikha Moza Bint Nassir, the First Lady of the State of Qatar. I recognize her role, not only as a member of the High Level Group whose report led to the establishment of the Alliance, but also in ***supporting*** the Alliance through important initiatives.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to reaffirm the relevance of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in these times of historical changes and **unprecedented** political, economic, social and cultural challenges.

Although the Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and many other international law instruments clearly prohibit discrimination on grounds of religion, race, gender and many other differences, sadly we live in a world of intolerance, xenophobia, marginalization, tensions and conflict.

The principles are clear. How to promote and apply the principles is the responsibility of leadership in our societies.

We owe it to our people, to the peoples of the world to fulfill their expectations.

These are real challenges which **threaten** our efforts to achieve our shared goals of peace and security, sustainable development and human rights.

Without **responsible leadership to manage wisely these challenges** our ability to coexist in our small planet is at risk.

As the great Nelson Mandela said "Our problems couldn't be solved without people and leaders working together, to create a shared society!"

Indeed, I believe that **responsible leadership** can create the necessary social **cohesion**, where every man and woman feel **included**.

I can see an important role for the Alliance of Civilizations in achieving our shared goals. I believe that the Alliance can enhance international cooperation and contribute to the efforts of the United Nations to address the challenges facing humanity today, particularly when they are rooted in identity and cultural underpinnings.

These challenges are at the core of the mandate of the Alliance and its legitimacy, as expressed in the report of the High Level Group that gave birth to the Alliance. What we need to advance on the road charted to us by the international community is a vision, responsible leadership, effectiveness and good decision making. In receiving your endorsement as high Representative, I am aware of the tremendous responsibility that you bestowed on me, and I pledge to you that I will work with determination to achieve our share goals.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today I will **briefly outline** for you the elements on which I intend to focus as part of my vision.

Before doing so, let me first take this opportunity to acknowledge the leadership of His Excellency President Jorge Sampaio as outgoing High Representative. President Sampaio has been a pioneer in giving a concrete expression to the Alliance as an institution-and we are all grateful for what he did.

Here are now the elements of my vision:

First, Building on Previous Achievements

First I intend to build on the achievements of my **predecessor** and move further to additional goals through various activities in the areas of Youth, Education, Media, and Migration.

Second, On Partnerships and cooperation in the multilateral system

The road to success is based on the principle of **partnership**.

The Alliance cannot implement its goals alone. I will focus on **strengthening** the active role of the Alliance and strive to ensure that the Alliance interact

and cooperate fully with the other components of the UN system. This will mean granting the Alliance practical means of implementation. My staff will work to ensure that our efforts **complement** the effective efforts of others, within the respective mandates.

I will also **reach out** to other international, regional and sub-regional organizations to develop partnerships with them.

Third, adding complementary tools to our conflict resolution tool box

The wisdom of **peace-loving** member states led to the establishment of the Alliance. This wisdom could help defuse tensions rooted in cultural differences and which **threaten** international peace and security.

Today, we **witness** intolerance, xenophobia, and **incitement** to hatred. In some societies, culture is **perceived** as source of division, instead of a path to dialogue and human solidarity.

In some regions minorities are victims of **atrocities** including mass killings, only because they belong to different cultures.

Holy books are **burned** and religious symbols are **defamed**.

But, there are also signs of hope- the hope that the International Community can overcome most difficult **crises**. We witness **momentum** to use the path of **mediation** for resolving disputes and tensions.

The Secretary General last year said in Istanbul, and I quote: "the Alliance could have an important **mediating role** in the many conflicts where culture or religion come into play". For my part, I received the support of member states when I **designated** Mediation as a **theme** for the 66th session of the UNGA .

In this framework, I can see the Alliance of Civilizations using mediation as a tool of **preventive** diplomacy.

Let me also call the attention of this Forum to the role of sports, arts, music and other forms of collective expressions of human values. These celebrations of humanity noble yearnings can foster the culture of peace, and the Alliance of Civilizations should make every effort to use them to that end.

Fourth, the UNAOC's role in the Development Agenda

The United Nations was built on the premise that dialogue is the best path to peace. That cultural diversity, freedom, mutual respect and respect for Human Rights, **enhance** our life.

The World Development Report **strongly suggests** that without harmony among different groups in a society, it is **not possible** to reach the needed **stability** for achieving sustainable development and prosperity.

Peace can last only where human rights are respected, because peace, security, human rights and development are **interconnected** and **mutually reinforcing**.

Following the Madrid, Istanbul and Rio Forums, the fourth AoC forum was held in December 2011 in my hometown of Doha.

It focused on the **interconnection** between diversity and development.

Historical experience has shown that diversity of cultures leads to diversity of **knowledge** and ideas.

As we think about the development agenda beyond 2015, those features of **inter-connected-ness** and **globalization** will have greater impact when we embrace diversity.

Therefore, the Doha outcome will be important **platform** for the work of the Alliance during my mandate.

Fifth, On Strengthening the Financing and Structure of the Alliance

As I **assume** my duties I will **identify** how the Alliance should operate, how it should be **structured** and how it **must** be financially supported if we are to **accomplish** its vital task.

The Alliance is grateful for the generous contributions of many Member States. However, as we consider future activities, we **must** take steps to **improve** the level and type of **predictable funding**.

I will tackle this issue at our Partners Assembly later this week.

On a similar note, the transition to new leadership creates new **opportunities** for **restructuring** the Alliance as an institution.

As I will be based in New York, UNAOC will have an opportunity to build a new **structural coherence**.

And since the Alliance has limited financial and human resources, I intend to locate **more support**, from donor countries, entities and partners.

Sixth, On increasing UNAOC's interaction with Media, Civil Society, Business Sector and Academia

Throughout my tenure, I will work in close cooperation and full coordination not only with the UN system but with all Member States, as well as with the Media, the Business Sector, Academia and Civil Society.

I am convinced that through our joint efforts we can promote the noble goals of the Alliance, foster international peace and security and strengthen relations between nations and cultures.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

I believe that the Vienna Declaration can serve our common path, leading to a future of stability and prosperity.

Lets us all work tirelessly to that end.

Thank you.