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**Foundation
Culture of Peace
BARCELONA**

"Youth for the Alliance of Civilizations" International Initiative

Intergenerational High Level Conference

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Intervention by

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First of all, please allow me to convey to you all the warmest greetings from Prof. Federico Mayor, President of the Foundation for a Culture of Peace, who has not been able to attend this very relevant encounter, and who has asked me to represent him and the Foundation. Prof. Mayor gives a tremendous importance to the involvement of Youth as the key actor in the Alliance of Civilizations initiative and, therefore, considers that activities such as this one are key for the proper implementation of the recommendations of the High Level Group Report of the Alliance that, as you are well aware, he did co-chair.

Honourable authorities, ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed for me an honour and a pleasure to address you all in this meeting proposed by the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation, which is taking place with the collaboration and the support of ISESCO, the Council of Europe, the UNDP, and is being so well hosted by the Heydar Aliyev Foundation, under the leadership of H. E. Mehriban Aliyeba. My congratulations to all.

My intervention, which I hope it will be of your interest, will be around three main axes. The first one on the linkage between the Alliance of Civilizations process and the Culture of Peace; the second one on some of the specific challenges of the Alliance process and their particular involvement with some specific actors; and the third one, some ideas about the role of youth in this complex context.

A) <u>The Alliance of Civilizations and the Culture of Peace</u>

Please let me share with you some thoughts regarding the intimate links between the AoC process and the Culture of Peace one, not only in their common background of shared values and principles, but also in their complementary interdependence both in their conception and in its implementation.

As most of you already know, when we talk about "Culture of Peace" we usually do refer to this concept as its was unanimously approved by the United Nations General Assembly in the year 1999 in its resolution A/RES/53/243. In this resolution –which also contains a specific plan of action- the Culture of Peace is conceived as:

(and I quote)

"…a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations…"
(Art. 1 of the Declaration)

This implies

The "*Adherence to the principles of freedom, justice, democracy, tolerance, solidarity, cooperation, pluralism, cultural diversity, dialogue and understanding at all levels of society and among nations*"
(Art. 1.i of the Declaration)

as well as

"Advancing understanding, tolerance and solidarity among all civilizations, peoples and cultures, including towards ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities" (Art 3.m of the Declaration)

(end of quote)

Complementary to that, as all of you are also aware, the AoC process was born as an initiative of the Spanish Prime Minister José-Luís Rodríguez-Zapatero in the year 2004 which was immediately seconded by the Prime Minister of Turkey, and some months later by the Secretary General of the United Nations at that time, Kofi Annan who, on the 15th of July 2005, announced the launch of the initiative and the will to create a High Level Group to be co-chaired by Prof. Federico Mayor and Prof. Mehmet Aydin.

The *Terms of Reference* of this High Level Group clearly stated, in complete accordance to the Culture of Peace principles, that:

(and I quote)

"The initiative responds to a broad consensus across nations, cultures and religions that all societies are interdependent, bound together in their development and security, and in their environmental,

economic and financial well-being. The Alliance seeks to forge collective political will and to mobilize concerted action at the institutional and civil society levels to overcome the prejudice, misperceptions and polarization that militate against such a consensus. And it hopes to contribute to a coalescing global movement which, reflecting the will of the vast majority of people, rejects extremism in any society."

and called the High Level Group to identify:

"-To strengthen mutual understanding, respect and shared values among different peoples, cultures and civilizations;

-To counter the influence of groups fomenting extremism and the exclusion of others who do not share their world views;

-To counter the threat to world peace and stability posed by extremism;

-To foster awareness in all societies that security is indivisible and it is vital need for all, and that global cooperation is an indispensable prerequisite for security, stability and development." [1]

(end of quote)

Moreover, the very first strong secondment of the Alliance by the whole international community was in September 2005 when it was explicitly welcomed in paragraph 144 of the Outcome Document of the World Summit on the occasion of the 60th Anniversary of the United Nations[2], precisely under the UN General Assembly item. of *Culture of Peace*

(and I quote)

"...We commit ourselves to taking action to promote a culture of peace and dialogue at the local, national, regional and international levels and request the Secretary-General to explore enhancing implementation mechanisms and to follow up on those initiatives. In this regard, we also welcome the Alliance of Civilizations initiative announced by the Secretary-General (on 14 July 2005)

(end of quote)

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[1] *Terms of Reference for the High Level Group* see: www.unaoc.org
[2] Which met in UN-New York in September 2005. See: http://www.un.org/summit2005/

Since then all the initiatives related to the Alliance of Civilizations taken in the framework of the UN General Assembly have been under the General Assembly item of *Culture of Peace[3]*, being one of the most notable the recent *High-level Dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace[4]*, -which I had the honour to address- and that took place in New York on the 4th and 5th of October, being this the first activity of the 62nd UN General Assembly just after the general debate of its opening.

With all what I have said until now, I think it is quite clear the mutual reinforcing relationship between the Culture of Peace and the Alliance initiatives, both of them result from this *other way* of understanding international relations, based on the strongest principles of the UN Charter, of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and of the genuine concept of multilateralism and interdependence.

b) Some of the various specific challenges of the AoC process, and some important actors not to be ignored

b.1) Regarding some of the specific challenges: perceptions vs. realities

In this second part of my intervention, I would like to make a particular reflection to one of the several specific challenges which are being addressed by the Alliance, this is the issue of PERCEPTIONS *versus* REALITIES.

In today's interconnected global society, that some define as a *screen-driven society* -driven by the screens of our TVs, of our computers and cell phones of 2nd and 3rd generation, etc.- some times the importance of perceptions become even more significant than the actual realities.

What defines the policies, what would create the feeling of a *clash of civilizations* –which, if it would exist I would define much more as a *clash of misunderstandings and ignorances*- (what -I repeat- creates the feeling of a *clash of civilizations*) is more the general perception of the

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[3] See, e.g., *Culture of peace: Note by the Secretary General*, UNGA A/61/175.
[4] See also UNGA Resolution A/RES/61/221 on *Promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace*.

existence of such a problem than the real existence of the problem itself. This is exacerbated by a media machinery –and some irresponsible political leadership- which keeps repeating –in some cases just mechanically, even without specific perverse intentions- stereotypes, misperceptions and misleading language that, instead of giving transparent and contrasted information of the reality, do create even more fear and suspicion.

To this respect, one of the main challenges of today when trying to find modalities by which ensure successful actions and policies in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue is to ensure <u>a double-track work,</u> which means two parallel tracks which, although being interlinked and complementary, are of complete different nature:

-On the one side, the track which deals with the real problems and realities which they do exist.

-On the other side, a second or parallel track that deals with the perceptions, the stories and the narratives that in too many cases foster, in one way or another, the atmosphere in which we live today.

It is of the utmost importance to understand this dual dimension of the work to undertake; because if it is not absorbed in the strategies of implementation of the different fields of action of the Alliance, there is a high risk of getting lost when trying to deal with too different domains at the same time. It is key to confront each *problematique* with the appropriate measures. To say it metaphorically: the best vaccine or remedy against the flue is completely useless, or even contradictive, when applied to a cold.

In this sense, when dealing with the REALITIES and the PERCEPTIONS I would underline two key areas of work:

-The one related with *the role media* (as recognised by the Alliance of Civilizations Report[5] and the UNGA Resolution 61/221)

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[5] *Alliance of Civilizations. Report of the High-Level Group. 13 November 2006.* See: www.unaoc.org. Specially paragraphs 6.24 to 6.27

-And the one related to Education, and especially *media-literacy* and *religious and culture education*[6]

In these two areas, the recommendations of the Report of the AoC are of high interest and should be carefully studied and implemented.

Even more, when working in theses areas, it is of equal importance what it is related to the issue of language and leadership, as recognised in the Alliance of Civilizations report[7].

(and I quote)

Many of the issues feeding tensions between communities arise at the crossroads of politics and religion. One of these issues is the impact of inflammatory language sometimes used by political and religious leaders and the destructive effect such language can have when disseminated by the media. (…)

In the current climate of fear and suspicion that grips communities throughout the world, leaders and shapers of public opinion have a special responsibility to promote understanding among cultures and mutual respect of religious belief and traditions. Given the influence and the respect they command, it is their duty to avoid using violent or provocative language about other people's beliefs or sacred symbols.
(Para 5.16 AoC Report)

(end of quote)

b.2) Regarding some actors: all levels of governance

At this stage, and before entering into the third and final part of my speech devote to the role of youth, I would like to make specific emphasis to another aspect related to the Alliance, and more specifically to the main actors to implement it.

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[6] Op. cit. 2: Paragraph 6.7 and 6.8
[7] Op. cit. 2: Paragraph 5.16

There is almost no need to say the key and leading role the whole UN system has to play in the promotion of the Alliance as well as Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, role which has already been strongly exercised in the last years. There is neither need for debate about the central role that actors such as the High Representative for the Alliance – President Sampaio- and UN agencies such UNESCO, plus the role of regional organisations such as ISESCO, the Council of Europe, or the OSCE, the League of Arab States, etc., are to have, and are even asking to have.

But, if we really want to ensure a real and permeable impact into the daily life, into the real grassroots reality, it is essential to involve, from my point of view, two main dimensions of actors.

On the one hand, it is needed to ensure the kind of institutions which are closer to the daily reality of the citizen and that even sometimes are already working in these areas (either because they have identified them as a priority, or simply because they just react to the day-by-day problems they face). Therefore, it is vital that regional and local authorities, are strongly involved in these processes and policies that they receive the attention they need, and that are identified as common-key allies in building this Alliance.

(To this respect, some of this work is already taking place. The United Cities and Local Governments, the international institution which represents a grand number of cities and municipalities around the world, have been in contact with the initiative since its process of conception and they formally seconded the initiative in their 2006 World Council, morevoer, if I am not wrong President Sampaio participated in the UCLG World Conference in Seul some days ago; even though I thought it was important to mention this here today).

In many municipalities and counties or provinces several interesting initiatives can be found in terms of intercultural and interreligious management and exchange, and even on intercultural and interreligious conflict management at the micro and grassroots levels. These bottom-up experiences ought to be one of the pillars for action by the Alliance if we really want this to be a success.

The same goes for the civil society organisations, which are already working for many years and very strongly in this field.

C) What role for Youth in such a complex environment?

Honourable authorities, ladies and gentlemen,

In this complex framework, what role for youth? Well, youth has been identified since the early stages of the Alliance process as one of the key areas of work, as well as one of the key actors to involve in the process.

To this respect, I would like to recall the fact that the AoC report clearly states:

(and I quote)

"…it is extremely important to recognise youth not only as a source of mobilisation, but as autonomous actor and partners".
(Para 6.12 of the AoC report)

(end of quote)

Therefore youth is called to be a partner, with its own voice, with its own perspective and innovative way of doings things, to implement the full report, all the recommendations in all the areas of work, and not only those devoted specifically to youth.

At this stage I would like to high-light three very specific areas in which youth actors could, in my view, make the difference in a process such as the Alliance one.

-Non-formal education. Non-formal education is one of the key spaces where a cosmopolitan approach to the issues of tolerance, citizenship, pertinence, relation with the other, etc. can be addressed more successfully.

-Become *bridge-builders* in all contexts, in all contexts, acting preventively in situations of unrest, etc. Organised youth movements are particularly talented at that, in part due to their major capacity of adaptation, to their "fresher" approach

to certain kind of problems, and a certain *major freedom of thought* (exchange programmes both in formal and non-formal education frame-works).

-The need to promote participation of youth at all levels (AoC Report p. 6.16), specially when talking about decision-making processes, and when dealing with those countries or geographical areas, were youth, while being the majority of the population, are specially distant from the places were decisions are taken. (Again here, the role of those political institutions that are closer to the citizen –the municipalities- is of the major importance.)

The Alliance report recommended, in order to make the above mentioned –and other- projects feasible, the creation of a Global Youth Alliance, drawing up from existing experiences and the initiatives which have already taken place (such as this meeting). This Alliance, together with the *AoC Youth Solidarity Fund* which is called to give economic support to this kind of activities, de still need much more definition, definition that is expected to be clarified in the frame-work of the 1st AoC Forum.

Indeed (as it is also assumed by the Implementation Plan drawn up by the High Representative) the 14-15th of January, the 1st AoC Forum will take place and will be preceded by an AoC Youth Forum the 13-14th. This forum is expected to discuss, among other issues, very relevant issues involving youth as *the need to strengthen media-literacy* (at all ages, for all), *Intercultural and Interreligious Youth Exchanges, Expanding university student exchange programs, Enhancing the capacity of the youth organisations as Peace Builders,* etc.

Moreover, even before the opening of the 1st AoC Forum, two projects are already being developed by the AoC Secretariat –in the framework of the *Collaborative Pilot Projects* of the AoC Implementation Plan- which are intimately linked to the youth arena, theses are the *Middle East Regional Youth Employment Centre* –this one under the leadership of H.H. Sheika Mozah-, and a working group to find modalities on how *Expanding Student Exchange Programmes*.

Honourable authorities, ladies and gentlemen,

As the AoC report states, we live in a world which is alarmingly out of balance, we also live in an increasingly complex world which at the same time is more interconnected and interdependent. In this context, the need to move forward, the urgency to move "from the dialogue to the alliance" is more acute than ever.

Initiatives as the one that has gathered all of us today here are more eager than ever. Therefore, let's all of us commit ourselves to move from discourse/speeches to action.

Thank you very much.