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ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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**ADDRESS TO THE COMMITTEE ON IMPROVING QUALITY OF LIFE
OF THE
EURO-MEDITERRANEAN PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY**

Lisbon, 31 January 2011

Honourable Members of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

- I am more than happy to address this distinguished committee at a very challenging time when new opportunities for change in the Euro-Mediterranean region seem to emerge in spite of great uncertainty lying before us.
- This reminds me past history, I mean the seventies in this country when the so-called “25 April” brought back rights, freedoms and democracy to people, and contributed to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity for all. Let’s hope that this carnation revolution will remain a paradigm of transition for a new wave of democratisation in our region.

Ladies and Gentlemen

- I will focus my remarks here on the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean which was adopted in Malta, in November 2010.

- Thanks to the joint efforts, determination and commitment of the countries of the region and international and regional organizations, members of the Group of Friends of the Alliance, an enhanced framework for regional cooperation in the field of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in this key of the world was agreed.
- We were all moved by a sense of urgency. Urgency of action aimed at contributing to build bridges of trust and confidence among peoples in a region carved up by major economic, political, cultural and religious fault-lines.
- Now the point I would like to make here is about the intrinsic link between cultural diversity and good governance of cultural diversity, on the one hand, and sustainable development on the other hand.
- Cultural diversity is the fourth pillar of sustainable development further to its economic, social and environmental dimensions.
- Good governance – or democratic governance – of cultural diversity stands for the human dimension of security, peace and development and it is therefore an indispensable complementary dimension of the Millennium Development Goals.

- The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNOAC) aims precisely to develop the agenda of the human dimension of peace and development, and contribute to build bridges within and among societies, to promote dialogue and understanding, and to forge the collective political will to address the world's imbalances.
- In the light of these words we see that rather than an option the Mediterranean is a duty for the UNAOC. Between the Mediterranean and the Alliance there is an umbilical link and to conceal it is to contribute to the alarming clash of ignorance that explains most of the difficulties that we are confronted with. But there is more than that because this alarming clash of ignorance is also feeding a clash of worldviews.
- However a consensus is possible. This is why promoting a constructive dialogue between different worldviews is absolutely necessary in order to promote tolerance and respect among human beings in all their diversity of belief, culture and language.
- As the Millennium Declaration remind us "differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity."

- Therefore promote human rights, democracy and good governance, and “strive for the full protection and promotion in all our countries of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all”, including minority rights, are key objectives to build peace and development in a sustainable way.
- We all know that poverty in many cases is coupled with sharp ethnic and religious cleavages in which minorities are insufficiently respected and institutions of government are insufficiently inclusive; we all know that poverty increases the risk of conflict through multiple paths; and we all also know that conflict tends to aggravate poverty and exclusion.

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- As a UN results oriented initiative with a global scope, the Alliance cannot deliver if it doesn't develop as a platform for cooperation at local level. By local level I mean here both the national and regional levels.
- To achieve its goals locally, the Alliance relies upon its members and stakeholders to come up with actions – actions to be implemented at national level, hopefully in close cooperation with civil society; and common actions to be implemented by a group of countries facing common challenges and willing to address them together.

- This is why I like to say that National Plans and Regional Strategies for intercultural dialogue covering education, youth, media and migration actions that countries were invited to develop are the Alliance's main building blocks.
- Regional Strategies are an open platform for cooperation. They are a common framework for cooperative action.
- The Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean is underpinned by five objectives to be achieved and I quote:
 - a) "promote dialogue and understanding among peoples, cultures, religions and beliefs, and foster a culture of peace in the Mediterranean region;
 - b)reinforce trust, tolerance and respect for diversity through cooperation, partnership and inclusion;
 - c)contribute to good governance and the rule of Law with a view to protecting and respecting cultural diversity, religious freedom and pluralism;
 - d)combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance including discrimination against persons based on their religion or belief and incitement to hate;
 - e)promote integration of legal migrants to further social cohesion and participatory societies and avert marginalization and exclusion of vulnerable migrant groups"

- These objectives are to be met through action-oriented initiatives involving various partners, mainly focused on the four fields of the Alliance – education, youth, media and migration.
- The Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean identifies ten interdependent priority domains of action for the next four years.
- Among these priorities, let me stress the following: promotion of gender equality, equal enjoyment of human rights and equal opportunities for women and men; cross-cultural education as well as learning and teaching intercultural skills and competences; intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a tool to promote tolerance, pluralism and respect for diversity and fight against extremism and radicalization; independence of the press, media literacy and respect for plurality of views and fundamental rights; cultural diplomacy through translations, arts and entertainment programs to deepen mutual understanding and challenge stereotypes; city-to-city cooperation or city diplomacy.
- Although driven by governments, the implementation of these actions relies upon a close cooperation with and between a wide array of stakeholders and first and foremost the involvement of civil society.

- Your role as legislators is of the utmost importance as you can press governments to act and make resources available, you can support civil societies' initiatives, you can push for more international cooperation.

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- The UNAOC Regional Strategy does not pretend to reinvent the wheel. It just aims at contributing to the general ongoing efforts to bring closer all relevant cultural, economic, social and political stakeholders, promote mutual understanding and improved perceptions of each other, defuse tensions and bridge divides, enhance security, human development and intercultural dialogue among societies, institutions and individuals in the Mediterranean region.
- Furthermore, by helping achieve these goals, this Regional Strategy can also favour progress in the Middle East peace process, particularly the negotiations that will lead to a two-state solution with the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security.

Request: [To Kasoulides]
→ to include a reference to alliance of
civilizations

Excellencies

Dear Friends

- As an old retired politician I am moved by an acute sense of urgency. Urgency to take action because inaction can only aggravate the current malaise that we all feel in our societies, whereas small changes in circumstances can produce big shifts in behaviour.

- This is why I dare to think that the Alliance can help make a difference – that it can contribute to generate the will to live together in mutual respect and appreciation of our ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious differences. That it can contribute to build a sense of hope, hope of change in societies whose youth feel that their future is blocked; hope of respect for human rights as the basis for human dignity; hope of reconciliation and peace among peoples as well as good neighbourly relations among all States, including between Israel and Palestine.

- So, allow me to call upon your indispensable collaboration.
- Let us work together to open up new avenues for better understanding and reinforced cooperation that aims to build renewed bridges of trust and confidence around, across and along the Mediterranean.
- Let's us joint efforts to bridge the divides
- Let's work to leave fears and prejudices behind, to repair human ties and to bind people together in a shared sea and a common destiny.
- I thank you very much