

**Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri**

# **Dialogue and Alliance of Civilizations**

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## **Preface**

The notion of coexistence of nations and peoples has evolved in international affairs from “mutual understanding” into “international cooperation”, then from “concord” into “entente”, then from “dialogue of religions”, particularly Islam and Christianity, into “dialogue of cultures and civilizations”, and eventually from “respect for cultural diversity” into “alliance of civilizations”. The process from “coexistence” to “dialogue” took decades during which the international community experienced two mechanisms of intergovernmental cooperation. The first was the League of Nations, founded shortly after World War I, and the second was the United Nations, established at the end of World War II. The Charter of this organization accommodates legal concepts, human rights principles, ethical values and constitutional rules that govern international relations and set the foundations for cooperation between the world's nations within the framework of international law.

The UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the other relevant international instruments make no allusion to the notion of dialogue of civilizations and cultures. So there is no such explicit term as “dialogue” in international law. The reason is that “dialogue” is a corollary of cooperation, entente, mutual respect and international legality. It is also the fruit of the efforts the international community makes towards ensuring the stability of human societies and maintaining world peace and security.

“Dialogue” as a linguistic and cultural conception consists in an interaction and exchange favoring rapprochement between

the parties involved and convergence of the ideas expressed. Actually, dialogue of cultures and civilizations rests on interaction among individuals, each representing a particular culture and a particular civilization, but who share a common and collective resolve to fulfill the world peoples' aspiration to live in security, peace and dignity.

In its turn, the alliance of civilizations has become a prerequisite for world peace in this crucial point in human history. Indeed, while intercultural dialogue is the choice of the wise, the alliance of civilizations is an enterprise involving inevitable tough responsibilities which should be shouldered by cultural elites, opinion leaders and decision-makers on equal footing. The alliance of civilizations as such will have no effect on people's lives and international relations unless it is based on constructive dialogue and full entente, and unless it is a common concern of all the parties concerned, each assuming its responsibilities within the limits of its sphere of competence. All efforts, intentions and ideas should thus be directed towards the same goal: fostering dialogue of cultures and strengthening the alliance of civilizations.

Since long ago, I have been reflecting on dialogue of cultures and alliance of civilizations and my latest contribution in this regard is a book entitled: "Towards the Alliance of Civilizations". A key issue I put forward in this publication, one of the first and maybe first ever Arabic publication on the alliance of civilization, is my appeal for the creation of a "United Civilizations Organization". I have also argued that the alliance of civilizations is humanity's last hope to save the world from the dangers lying ahead and to build bridges of entente, cooperation and coexistence between nations and peoples in a world replete with overlapping

and often clashing ideas, doctrines and political, economic and cultural theories, thus creating a gloomy atmosphere at all levels. What humanity is enduring today at the international level testifies to this unhappy situation.

This essay I am publishing in English and French is an attempt to elaborate and entrench those ideas. I have thus been concerned with anchoring the rationale underlying the alliance of civilization and analyzing the theoretical and functional connotations of the concept of the alliance of civilizations from an Islamic perspective, while making recourse, when applicable, to the international instruments dealing with the concept after it was adopted by the UN, following the establishment of the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations by the former UN Secretary General. For the record, this UN body held two sessions of the International Forum on the Alliance of Civilizations (Madrid, January 2008; Istanbul, April 2009) in which I took part and addressed the international community.

May Allah guide us to the right path.

**Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri**

The Director General of the Islamic  
Educational, Scientific and Cultural  
Organization (ISESCO)

## **Dialogue as a first step on the Path of Alliance**

Is it true that the world has evolved from the dialogue of civilizations to the alliance of civilizations? Such question arises at a time when tensions in international relations are escalating and in the presence of an alarming deterioration of security, peace and stability in many parts of the world. Behind this wondering is also the worsening political, intellectual and spiritual crisis which caused many international and regional problems that threaten the stability of human societies, hinder peace and security and prevent the establishment of solid foundations for a world order with a human face, a civilizational orientation and legitimate principles.

Dialogue is a first step on the path of alliance while understanding paves the way for coexistence. Both represent a solid foundation of the dialogue of civilizations and cultures which in turn could pave the way for a cooperation that benefits humanity as a whole. One specificity of civilization, any civilization, is its ability to interact and be in communion with other civilizations.

The alliance of civilizations is a must if humanity is to build its order and achieve the harmony of its components. In fact, the alliance of civilizations is the lifeline that will rescue the world from the grave dangers besieging it. It is the bridge on which to build mutual understanding, cooperation and coexistence between nations and peoples in a world that is replete with diverse and, sometimes, clashing ideas, doctrines and political, economic and cultural theories.

The alliance of civilizations is the essence of the inter-civilizational dialogue theory which has emerged and took form since its adoption by the UN General Assembly in one of its resolutions, but long before that. In fact, the Muslim world was

first to present this theory and sought to actively apply it in its drive to spread the culture of dialogue and bolster the international efforts to promote the core values of dialogue. I personally was honoured to contribute my share towards this end. I, from my position, helped entrench the principles of dialogue among civilizations and cultures and strove to support the efforts of the international community, governments and international and regional organizations to adopt dialogue as a basis of international policy at present and in the future.

## **On the concept of the alliance of civilizations**

If the United Nations has adopted the idea of the alliance of civilizations proposed recently by the Spanish Prime Minister from the pulpit of the UN General Assembly<sup>(1)</sup>, this concept is far from novel for us. Many thinkers and authors from the Muslim world have addressed it in the past, and I had a chance to tackle it in different respects in some of my writings. Furthermore, anyone engaged with the dialogue of civilizations would not have ignored the idea of the alliance of civilizations since dialogue is not an end in itself, but a means to reach human coexistence, mutual understanding and cooperation. This formula, **the alliance of civilizations**, is what breathes life into dialogue and makes it constructive and effective.

Any idea that serves human values and bolsters the efforts of the international community to bring about world peace and security and spread the culture of justice and peace flows in the same direction as the alliance of civilizations. Any endeavour

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(1) The Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero launched his initiative to promote the Alliance of Civilizations from the pulpit of the UN General Assembly, on 22 September 2004. On that occasion, I wrote him a letter wherein I expressed ISESCO's support to the initiative. The Prime Minister responded with a letter wherein he expressed his gratefulness to ISESCO's support.

made by an individual or a group towards rapprochement, cooperation and coexistence between nations and peoples one another, only helps consolidate the alliance of civilizations because it fulfils one of the objectives set for this alliance.

In my books and publications<sup>(2)</sup>, I have addressed many intellectual and cultural issues through a civilizational vision that helped me open up to the times and look forward to the future. Despite their diversity, these publications remain mostly within the spectrum of the dialogue and alliance of civilizations, although some addressed historical events related to the attacks on Islam and may have seemed far removed from alliance connotations and concepts. But, beneath the surface, they remain close to this axis because they were initially motivated by issues related to alliance of civilizations in its broader scope.

The issues that I address in my writings are a step on the road to civilizational alliance and may be considered an addition enriching the idea of alliance since they strive to renew and develop this idea from various dimensions, it being understood that the alliance takes many facets. These forms change from one stage to another according to the vision held at a given time and the changes in political and intellectual issues that crop up in their interaction with developments. They endeavor to bring about conditions conducive to peace and to the coexistence of mankind, and avoidance of clashes and crises that undermine human civilizations in general.

The alliance of civilizations is the natural outcome and fruit of the dialogue of civilizations. It is the culmination of the well-

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(2) Including the four books published by Dar Al Shuruq in Cairo, "Towards the Alliance of Civilizations", "Dialogue for Co-existence", "Ideas for Dialogue", and "Dialogue with the Self and the Other".

intentioned efforts of the sage of this world over many decades, particularly the past eight years, and in particular since the UN General Assembly announced its decision to proclaim **2001 as the UN Year for the Dialogue of Civilizations**.

Represented by an elite of intellectuals and interested international and regional organizations, the international community has evolved from the stage of dialogue which involved at first promoting the culture of dialogue, fostering trust in this culture through forums and gatherings and drawing attention to the importance of dialogue in bringing closer divergent viewpoints and civilizational and cultural groups to a phase of alliance of civilizations. Such phase requires a civilizational coexistence based on mutual respect and common interests and on international laws that declare all states as equal, guarantee equal rights for nations and peoples and set the conditions for establishing peace and security in the world.

Today, and similar to international relations, alliance is based on the rule of equality and mutual dependence, and on the premise of a shared aspiration. It does not necessarily presuppose the equality of the allied parties since an admission of equality contradicts the spirit itself of an alliance. Indeed, an alliance is a coalition of culturally diverse parties with different interests and capacities who are encouraged to create this alliance out of their shared awareness of the need to overcome the differences and obstacles that stand in the way of an understanding beneficial to their respective interests.

## **Alliance in theory and practice**

If an alliance is the agreement by two parties to become each other's ally, this agreement gives rise to a coalition. The agreement of a group of individuals of different civilizations to forge a

civilizational and cultural alliance does not presuppose unification because difference is the essence of nature and cultural and civilizational diversity is a sunnah of the universe. This alliance provides people with a framework for collective action that serves noble human objectives, for the natural ambition they all share for stability and peace, for prosperity and harmony, and for a new human civilization that arises from the amalgamation and alliance of all civilizations and cultures.

Perhaps, the theory of an alliance of civilizations at this stage in the world's history has little chance of implementation, but the vanguard reform ideas which changed peoples' lives and propelled them from weakness and backwardness to strength and progress, first emerged as idealistic ideas that no one expected to come to fruition. But they did, thanks to the strong will of the people who believed with all their heart in progress and angled for it with all their might and natural disposition for progress, growth and continuous renewal.

If the international community shows signs of a willingness to see a decisive action carried out within the framework of international cooperation to give a new lease of life to the human civilizational edifice in ways that have not been elaborated yet, the alliance of civilizations may be a suitable and applicable formula. It is the thesis put forth in many forums and at various levels. This idea was the fruit of the dialogue of civilizations and cultures which reacted to changes and whose concepts translated into a mutual understanding that is today agreeable to most parties.

In practical terms, the alliance of civilizations is the most effective tool for reforming conditions, and saving humanity from a mass of problems and escalating crises that international policy has so far failed to resolve in a fair and decisive manner

through conventional diplomacy and other methods that lack transparency, seriousness and dedication.

Renewing the civilizational edifice of the world as one entity through the alliance of civilizations, not just dialogue, and through fruitful cooperation, enlightened by the teachings of divine religions and human principles as defined in the UN Charter, is the most important mission of the wise and the strongly determined. It is also the mission of noble-minded and enlightened people from all walks of life, and from different cultures and civilizations, to build a safe, bright and prosperous future where Man's dignity is not violated nor his rights abused, where the strong does not eat the weak, where all refer to the law and where the values of coexistence, tolerance and human kinship prevail.

While each alliance has aims to fulfill, these being the motives behind its creation, the noble objectives of the alliance of civilizations deserve the sacrifices of its loyal champions who toil for the general benefit of mankind. These include the restoration of peace and security, as well as fighting poverty, deadly diseases, organized crime and terrorism under all its forms, the exploitation of man, human rights abuses, the repression of free will and depriving people of their independence and freedom, drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, the promotion of racial discrimination and supremacy, the production of mass destruction weapons, and the unnatural and immoral uses of genetic engineering. These objectives are indisputably a concern for the international community in these times. Placing these concerns at the heart of the civilizational alliance strategy, and leaving governments and international organizations without civilizational support and backup are two different matters. Attempting to meet these objectives within the framework of an alliance of civilizations raises the chances of their success and provides a broader scope of action.

## **Alliance of civilizations in the context of international relations**

The founding of the United Nations Organization was no more than a dream after World War II. There was not a glimmer of hope of an agreement between countries torn apart by war to create a more developed and modern alternative to the League of Nations whose existence was ineffective in preventing this war. But the will of the international community, with a destructive war freshly behind it, triumphed over evil inclinations and managed to create an international organization on strong bases and with a new vision of the world's future in the postwar era. The United Nations Organization has ushered the world on a new age of international cooperation to prevent the recurrence of war and promote international relations, based on the principles of peace and security.

But the United Nations Organization was created on a basis that was unfair in terms of human justice. It was erected on the sovereignty of the five permanent members of the Security Council through their exclusive veto privilege. Many are the crises, tragedies and violations caused by the use of this unfair privilege granted by the UN Charter to the five permanent members of the Security Council.

If the world is moving towards a restructuring and reform of the United Nations, starting with the Security Council, and studies and debates have gained some ground in this regard, there is an ever more pressing need for what could be called the **Organization of Allied Civilizations** or something similar that would equal the United Nations and support it, working side by side with it to fulfill the objectives laid out in the Charter, along with other objectives which were not given due attention when the United Nations was first established in 1945 and which now constitute a source of hope for humanity.

This civilizational project presupposes many other tasks to be fulfilled and a long road of joint action to be taken. The task is not easy, and the road is not easy to cross. The obstacles are many and the interests of certain international powers clash with the fulfillment of these objectives. These powers will spare no effort to undermine all action aimed at this noble end. But that shall not weaken the willpower of the world's wise men, those who strive for an alliance of civilizations that holds nothing but the promise of goodness for the entire humanity, today and tomorrow by the grace of Allah.

### **The Islamic world's responsibility with regard to fostering the alliance of civilizations**

After reviewing the intellectual and cultural premises of the alliance of civilizations, we need to present the stance of the Islamic world on this alliance. The Islamic world carries a great responsibility in consolidating it at all levels.

But before that, Muslims need to understand the real significance of this alliance and the efforts that the Islamic world can contribute towards the international action to create it.

The appeal made by the UN Secretary General for the creation of an alliance of civilizations met with large consensus among nations, religions and cultures, proving that all societies are interrelated and interdependent when it comes to their growth and security, their ecological security and their economic and financial welfare. This alliance seeks to create a collective political will and a harmonious mobilization at the institutional and civil levels to put an end to extremism, misconceptions and polarization which runs counter to this consensus. The sought-after objective is to contribute to the creation of a universal

coalition that shuns extre-mism in any society and expresses the will of the clear majority of peoples.<sup>(3)</sup>

The events of the recent years have led to an aggravation of the mistrust, fears and mutual misunderstanding between Muslim and Western societies, a situation that was exploited by extremists around the world. Only an all-encompassing alliance can prevent further deterioration in the relationship between societies and nations and that may threaten international stability. This alliance seeks to oppose this trend by creating a model of mutual respect among civilizations and cultures.<sup>(4)</sup>

To steer this initiative, the former UN Secretary General, Mr Kofi Annan, created a high-level group in consultation with high ranking co-sponsors. The objectives of this group are to:

- Assess the new and developing threats to international peace and security, particularly the political, social and religious forces that contribute to extremism.
- Determine the collective measures at the highest institutional and civil society levels to confront these tendencies.
- Recommend an action plan that is applicable by states, international organizations and the civil society and that encourages concord among nations.<sup>(5)</sup>

The High-Level Group will take into consideration practical strategies such as:

- Consolidating mutual understanding and common values of various peoples, cultures and civilizations.

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(3) Website of the United Nations Organization, on the High-Level Group for the Allianc of Civilizations.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Ibid.

- Countering the adverse impact of groups that promote extremism and the exclusion of those who do not share their vision of the world.
- Countering the threat to world peace and stability posed by extremism.
- Increasing awareness within all societies about the idea that security is not selectively provided, that it is an essential prerequisite for all, and that world cooperation is a sine qua non condition for the establishment of peace, stability and development.<sup>(6)</sup>

The High-Level Group will present a report containing an analysis and action plan for governments, international organizations and NGOs. The report will also propose practicable measures such as:

- Stressing the importance of mutual understanding and proposing specific mechanisms by developing a framework of better international cooperation and using information channels (such as the internet) to encourage and formulate a general debate in constructive ways.
- Encouraging cooperation among existing initiatives aiming to enable the clear majority to establish a work program. Most of these initiatives are run by moderates who reject the ideas of extremists.
- Developing partnerships likely to help societies better understand each their specificities, while highlighting their common features.
- Proposing measures through which educational systems can encourage knowledge about and understanding of other cultures and religions.

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(6) Ibid.

- Targeting youth in order to foster values of moderation, cooperation and respect for diversity.
- Stressing that peace, security, stability and growth are basic rights for all and that world cooperation in achieving them is essential, and proposing practical mechanism for achieving mutual security.<sup>(7)</sup>

This is how the United Nations website presents the High-Level Group for the Alliance of Civilizations and the objectives of this alliance. To what level can the Islamic world participate in fulfilling those noble objectives? What are the potentialities, resources and means available within the Islamic world for that noble mission? What is required of the Islamic world to foster understanding and mutual understanding among Muslim and Western societies? What is the civilizational message that the Islamic world must carry at this stage in history?

In the light of this alliance of civilizations, one may ask: How is the Islamic world portrayed today? What are the resources and capacities of the Islamic world, and how ready is it to tackle the all-consuming globalization while preserving its vital interests?

The political map of the Islamic world is built around diversity in line with the constitutional principles whereby each Islamic country is considered as being fully sovereign. Thus, politically and mathematically speaking, the general condition of the Islamic world mirrors the general conditions in each of its countries.

The stances taken by states usually reflect their choices and policies and are a political expression of national sovereignty.

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(7) Ibid. The Group presented its report to the former UN Secretary General at an official ceremony held in Istanbul on 13 November 2006. The author attended that ceremony.

Legally speaking, unifying stances on a given matter requires a constitutional process that states engage in through the exercise of their sovereignty. It would therefore be difficult to reach such a level of consensus in view of the nature of the regional Islamic system represented by the Charter of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. It is neither possible nor reasonable to ask for a unification of the stances of Islamic countries on the issue of globalization and other developments currently unfolding in the world for two reasons:

**Firstly**, the issue does not require taking position since globalization is a *fait accompli* that cannot be erased.

**Secondly**, unifying stances is impossible in the current political and legal situation. What is instead required is coordination, coexistence, exchange of opinions and expertise, improving commercial exchanges, and creating a unified Arab market. After that, an Islamic unified market would be created in implementation of the action of the OIC Standing Committee for Economic and Commercial Cooperation (COMCEC) and the relevant resolutions of the Islamic Summit conferences and the Councils of the OIC Foreign Ministers.

From such perspective relating to the particularity of the Islamic world, the most feasible option is a **coordination of stances**. This requires the mobilization and combining of efforts, fostering Islamic solidarity and expanding the scope of cooperation in all aspects of public Muslim life, in implementation of the objectives of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, and harnessing the resources of joint Islamic action for cooperation, complementarity and coordination at all levels. The resolutions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Extraordinary Islamic Summit meeting, held in Makkah Al Mukarrama in December 2005, reflected the need for a new era

of joint Islamic action which, if renewed and rationally organized, can change conditions in the Islamic world for the better.

## **Alliance in a globalized world**

The globalization order imposed by the political and economic might of international powers currently dominating international policy is in itself a challenge that cannot be tackled by countries lacking the conditions of industrial, economic, scientific and technological immunity and the necessary strength to sidestep the negative impacts and dangerous repercussions of this order.

Yet, the Islamic world, with its tremendous human and economic resources can, if the strong political will and proper planning exist, deal with globalization through wide investment and interaction, be proactive in steering this globalization, contribute to the formulation of its contents and steer the alliance of civilizations towards more favorable terrain.

Being conscious of the real significance of the alliance of civilizations, we can only realize the weight of the responsibility that falls to the Islamic world vis-à-vis this alliance, and gauge the capacities of the OIC Member States to discharge this mission and shoulder this responsibility in such a way as to make the Islamic world a dynamic and active civilizational ally capable of influencing the course of events preoccupying the international community, and flowing in the direction of human cooperation for a better world for humanity.

While the concept of inter-civilizational dialogue started in the Islamic world, to be subsequently adopted by the United Nations, the concept of the alliance of civilizations was warmly welcomed by Muslims, particularly the intellectual and cultural

elite and the champions of joint Islamic action. This proves that the readiness of the Islamic world to consolidate international action and develop this concept is truly high. Suffice it to mention the efforts made by the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to spread the culture of civilizational alliance through the many international and regional conferences and symposia it organized in this regard and those in which it took part or co-organized.

However, our commitment to an objective analysis, intellectual integrity and transparency urges us to admit that the Islamic world cannot discharge its role in consolidating the alliance of civilizations unless it engages in a reconciliation with itself, **renewing the mechanisms of collective action and achieving satisfactory levels of reform. Meeting the conditions of power, immunity and ability to work within the larger international environment, is a pressing need and a necessary tool. Weakness cannot produce dialogue or alliance, nor can it bring respect and consideration on the international scene. If truth be said, the Muslim world shows worrisome signs of weakness.**

In view of this, the responsibility of the Islamic world vis-à-vis the alliance of civilizations can be honoured by acquiring strength, immunity and the ability to contribute to the renewal of an Islamic civilization that can serve as a tributary feeding the human civilization in the present and the future.

This does not mean that the Islamic world does not currently have the ability or the means to contribute to consolidating the culture of dialogue and alliance of civilizations. We are above this sort of defeatism and despair. But the contribution that the Islamic world can make to today's world may be limited in its

impact due to the nature of the phase currently experienced by Muslims and to the size of the problems and challenges they are facing at many levels.

Nonetheless, the Islamic world, represented by its governments, organizations and institutions working in education, culture, science, technology, information, computer science, communication and the environment, has to assert its presence, building on its distinguished civilizational position, and to take part in the human drive to spread the culture of civilizational alliance. It must consolidate the values of this alliance, strong with the tremendous civilizational riches held by the Islamic world and under the guidance of the Quran which lights the way towards effective action, civilizational edification and a better future.

One of the conditions of entrenching the alliance of civilizations is the combination of international efforts, and the rallying of intellectual and cultural elites within the framework of international and regional organizations and institutions in a joint effort to bring the concept civilizational alliance out of the realm of theory to that of concrete actions. Intensifying the action of collective research can lead to positive results in serving lofty human objectives. The efforts so far made at the international level, through the organization of two conferences on the alliance of civilizations, the first in Madrid and the second in New York, need to be further developed. Such is the responsibility of the international community, particularly the intellectual, cultural and media elites.<sup>(8)</sup>

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(8) The author participated in the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum (Madrid, 15-16 February 2008), and the Second Alliance of Civilizations Forum (Istanbul, 6-7 April 2009) where he presented the Islamic world's perspective with regard to the Alliance of Civilizations.

## First Alliance of Civilizations Forum

I had the honour to participate in the First World Forum on the Alliance of Civilizations in Madrid. In the address I delivered at this event I said: *“The core principle adopted by the Muslim world to build bridges of dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions is an authentic one because it springs from profoundly entrenched values upheld by more than 1.25 billion believers in the message of Islam, the message of light and tolerance. It is a message of brotherhood that believes in the unity of human origins, in the equality of all mankind in dignity and in the right to life in an environment of security, peace, harmony and understanding.”*

On that occasion, I had to mention the origin of the initiative of the alliance of civilizations: *“This initiative which the Spanish government is launching, and which consolidates the framework within which today's forum is being held, enables this country, with its rich historical and civilizational legacy and the strong ties it entertains with the east and the west, the north and the south, to be a forerunner in laying strong bases for the alliance of civilizations, through concrete initiatives that promote the mobilization of dynamic powers for a genuine alliance of civilizations. This alliance will put an end to long centuries of unjustified mistrust, hostility and conflict between the civilizational blocks that form humanity at this stage in its history.”*

In the address I delivered in the presence of the heads of the Spanish and Turkish governments, high-level officials and many directors general of international and regional organizations, I sought to present the Islamic perspective on the alliance of civilizations. I pointed out, *“The alliance of civilizations is conditional*

*upon reconciliation with the past, overcoming historical complexes, and reinstating cultures and civilizations to their rightful position. This requires a civilizational openness based on the respect for the cultural specificities of the peoples and nations that are partners in the making of today's human civilization. If Spain is behind the idea of the alliance of civilization, we hope that another historic initiative will come from this country to consolidate the reconciliation between the Islamic world and the West, and spread trust and serenity. Such initiative will increase the appreciation of the international community for this vanguard country of creative civilizational and cultural initiatives.”*

In my address to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Forum on the Alliance of Civilizations (Istanbul, April 2009), I called for further support for the joint human action aimed at fostering dialogue of cultures and the alliance of civilizations, through sustained efforts at all levels in a bid to disseminate the culture of peace, dialogue and alliance, and to entrench the values of tolerance and coexistence, in strict adherence to human-rights principles, to the UN Charter, and, most importantly, to the religious and moral values having prevailed throughout the successive universal civilizations.

I argued that in no point in history has humanity been in such a dire need for a more consolidated alliance of civilizations than it is today. Actually, sixty four years have elapsed since the inception of the United Nations and sixty one after the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, but the policies hostile to intercultural dialogue and to the alliance of civilizations, are witnessing a rising trend which runs counter to the values of tolerance, concord and coexistence among nations and peoples, to mutual understanding of individuals and communities, and to the principles of cooperation among countries.

I also explained to the Forum that today's global problems with their negative impact which undermines world peace and security and haunts the human conscience, are the result of the renunciation of a dominant minority to the values of dialogue and alliance, who act in defiance of international law, the lofty universal values and international legality.

In the same vein, I argued further that *“such a situation has driven the world into a vicious cycle with no end in sight, thus provoking crises, conflicts and wars in such countries as Palestine, Afghanistan and Somalia and in other parts of the world where people are bereft of their most basic right to a decent stable life”*. I also pointed out that the Islamic world, which was the first to float the idea of dialogue among civilizations, from the rostrum of the UN General Assembly, believes the Forum provides another opportunity to reaffirm its firm commitment to the values of alliance of civilizations, through fulfillment of the historical responsibility towards supporting the contemporary universal civilization, and enriching it by Islamic thought and civilizational action, resting, among others, on the principles of tolerance, respect for difference in cultural stripes and civilizational specificities.

## **ISESCO and the Alliance of Civilizations Mission**

By way of conclusion, I said that *“we, in ISESCO, have the conviction that the alliance of civilizations is a strategic option. It equally views dialogue of cultures as the surest way conducive to stability and to the establishment of world peace and security. It is within that framework that we labor jointly with the international and regional organizations sharing the same interest, to disseminate the culture of justice and peace and promote the respect for creative cultural diversity. Our action focuses on*

*fostering mutual understanding and coexistence, developing the education curricula, especially education on human rights and civism, and education of future generations on the values of tolerance and mutual respect.”*

As such the Alliance of Civilization will be doomed to failure unless the international community assumes its responsibilities regarding the degrading situation in the Palestinian territories. And unless the new American administration honors its obligations to achieving peace and security in the Middle East under the American Constitution, the UN Charter, Human rights instruments and international law, the ideas expressed in President Barack Obama's addresses on the relation between the USA and the Muslim world, which he delivered to the Turkish parliament (Ankara, 6 April 2009) and to the Islamic World (Cairo University, 4 June 2009) will be mere lip service.

I had the honor to talk to President Barack Obama on the occasion of the reception ceremony organized by Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Istanbul, on 6 April 2009, in the presence of Turkish President Abdullah Gul, Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Zapatero and a host of senior international personalities. It was an opportunity for me to thank the American president for his positive approach and affirm to him our resolve, within the framework of joint Islamic action, to anchor the culture of mutual respect and the values of justice, peace and dialogue, and our support for his just outlook, wishing him good luck in his endeavors to restore to America its true standing as the world's superpower. I thus conveyed to him the Islamic world's approach to the Alliance of civilizations in its broad sense which entails, inter alia, reconciliations between the Islamic word and the West and our support to all efforts aimed at achieving this noble human goal.

After a deep reflection on today's world situation, and a considerable effort in drawing lessons from human history, I feel now confident that fostering the concept of the alliance of civilizations should start from the principles common to all cultures and civilizations. Consideration should be given to the urgent need for peace and security in all parts of the world and the need to work under the umbrella of the UN Charter and in accordance with the international law which can prevent any deviations from the lofty and noble objectives of the alliance of civilizations.