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**CIVILIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION  
AND ITS ROLE IN PROMOTING  
UNDERSTANDING BETWEEN PEOPLES**

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## Introduction

The international community is increasingly interested in supporting the efforts deployed at many levels to promote inter-cultural dialogue, alliance of civilizations and coexistence of peoples. This interest is dictated by the need to rebuild the world on the foundations of tolerance and mutual respect, and to make of right, justice, equality and human rights guiding principles of international relations and a cure to humanity's problems, crises, tensions and all associated dangers on world peace and security.

As dialogue among cultures is a natural prelude to communication between civilizations which, in turn, leads to understanding between peoples, I have been interested in addressing the notion of communication between civilizations and analyzing its main connotations. I have thus tried to show the relationship between communication between civilizations, dialogue among cultures and alliance of civilizations, based on the Islamic view of communication as an extension of the modern concept of peoples' mutual understanding on the firm basis of the common ground of universal values.

The invitation extended to me by the Muslim Association in Denmark to lecture in Copenhagen on “**Civilizational Communication and its Role in Promoting Understanding between Peoples**”, on 14 Ramadan 1431 A.H. (24 August 2010) provided me with an occasion to talk in English to a spectrum of intellectuals, Danish officials and ambassadors of Islamic countries in Denmark on such a subject so crucial to world public opinion, particularly for intellectual and academic elites.

As a lexical and conceptual entity, communication between civilizations consists in building bridges between cultures and civilizations by promoting stronger bonds between peoples.

Communication as such may take place between both individuals and groups through the sharing and discussion of ideas and opinions and through a collective work towards finding solutions to the problems of peoples and nations.

In practical terms, communication between civilizations is the basis of the alliance of civilizations. It is the most effective tool for reforming the world's conditions and saving humanity from a mass of problems and escalating crises that international policy, with its conventional diplomacy and other methods that lack transparency, sincerity, dedication and ethical integrity, has so far failed to resolve in a fair and sustainable manner.

The main idea of this lecture I am publishing in Arabic, English and French consists in the fact that as an interactive process, communication between civilizations involves mutuality of contact (not severance) between two parties seeking to reciprocate and cooperate. Such a sophisticated form of human interaction is the embodiment of the collective will and need of all those who are engaged in this endeavor to coexist and understand each other.

Communication under all its forms is primarily a civilized behavior. Today's world is in a dire need for such civilized behaviors and practices as they are likely to relieve tension between human communities and enhance international cooperation towards further dialogue among cultures, closer alliance of civilizations, enhanced world peace and more disciplined relations between nations and peoples within a strict enforcement of international law.

Invited to talk to a host of officials and politicians in a world context marked by tense Muslim-West relations, particularly in Denmark, in the aftermath of the shameful cartoons

which provoked a widespread outrage among Muslims, I decided to talk on the issue of communication between civilizations. My decision was motivated by two things. The first concerns the need for an intellectual backup for the international effort to promote a culture of dialogue among cultures and alliance of civilizations, based on new ideas and innovative approaches likely to give a strong impetus to those relations. The second concerns the need to redress misconceptions about Islam, the Islamic civilization and the Muslim world in a way that presents facts as they are in a language the world understands.

I think that addressing the West in its language, logic and rationality is the right answer to the pressing need implied by the deteriorating situation of relations between the Muslim world and the West in its extended cultural sense that transcends the narrow confines of geography. This lecture is a step in this direction. It is aimed at redressing some misconceptions, presenting the Islamic approach to contemporary issues and global affairs, and shedding light on some facts often unknown to the Western public opinion concerning the suffering of the Palestinian people because of the cruel Israeli occupation and its repetitive usurpation of their rights. The lecture also tackles other issues that preoccupy international public opinion.

May Allah bring our endeavors to fruition and guide us to the right path.

**Dr Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri**

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

It is an honor for me to be invited to this Ramadan evening held by the Muslim Association of Denmark to contribute a lecture on “**Civilizational Communication and its Role in Promoting Understanding between Peoples**”. This is one of the current international themes with a direct bearing on three other issues of major concern for the international community: namely,

- **Dialogue of Cultures;**
- **Rapprochement of Cultures;**
- **Alliance of Civilizations.**

(**Civilizational Communication**) is the fruit of dialogue and rapprochement between cultures. As such, it is another concept which further strengthens the notion of coexistence of peoples on the firm basis of common values and principles inherent in revealed religions and international legality.

It is also the highest expression into which human coexistence and mutual understanding and respect have matured. Communication, consisting in meaningful interaction, involves mutuality of contact (not severance) between two parties seeking to reciprocate and cooperate.

It follows from this that communication between civilizations, which results from dialogue and rapprochement of cultures, builds not only on the rich heritage of cultures and civilizations, but also on the set of values and principles shared by peoples and nations in the world. It is the embodiment of the collective will of all those who are engaged in this endeavor.

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A lecture delivered in English in Copenhagen, Denmark, at the invitation of the Muslim Association of Denmark (14 Ramadan 1431 A.H / 24 August 2010).

We strongly endorse the idea of communication between civilizations as a logical consequence of dialogue and rapprochement between cultures, and as a factor conducive to alliance of civilizations, to which we devote most of our attention. We also maintain that understanding between peoples should be strengthened by channeling the world's cultural heritage into promoting such alliance. We will continue, as we have over the past 9 years, cooperating with our partners at international and Islamic organizations to enhance the dialogue of cultures. For we are determined to work together to blazon forth dialogue and promote the culture of communication and alliance of civilizations towards global peace culture. It is really important, at this time, for humanity to mend centuries of misunderstanding and hatred that have led to destructive wars and conflicts between peoples and nations.

I am convinced, from my experience, that communication and alliance of civilizations cannot bear fruit unless based on mutual respect, in line with the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the other covenants and instruments that form the large body of the international law. This requires that an end be put to the gross infringements of peoples' right to self-determination, committed in utter breach of international legality. It is also high time that recurrent human rights' violations in many countries came to a cessation, and concerted efforts were made to prevail on the UN General Assembly to issue a resolution which incriminates affront to religions and religious sanctity.

There can be no doubt that such unlawful acts and policies which obstruct communication and alliance of civilizations and take away from our common efforts ought to be widely condemned.

## Investing Common Cultural Heritage

Therefore, we insist on the need for effective, humane investment of the common cultural heritage of civilizations toward increased communication. Such investment, we believe, will help dispel suspicion and misconceptions, and lead to deeper understanding and stronger commitment to building peaceful coexistence of cultures and civilizations as the basis for dialogue, rapprochement and alliance of civilizations. We argue that the common cultural heritage shared between the Islamic world and Europe in particular will undoubtedly provide the basic groundwork to overcome all pitfalls awaiting all those who are active in promoting communication and the alliance of civilizations.

If the United Nations has adopted the idea of the alliance of civilizations, which was proposed a few years ago by Spanish Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero from the pulpit of the UN General Assembly, 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 ensues from the (**Communication between Civilizations**).

## Fostering the Culture of the Alliance of Civilizations

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 follows in the

same direction as the alliance of civilizations. Any endeavor made by an individual or a group of people towards rapprochement, communication, 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, I have addressed various issues from different religious and cultural backgrounds through a civilizational vision that helped me open up to the present and look forward to the future. Despite their diversity, these publications remain mostly within the spectrum of dialogue, rapprochement, communication, coexistence between cultures and alliance of civilizations.

Communication between civilizations follows from mutual understanding and respect. Similarly, if alliance is the agreement by two parties to become one another'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 result of this universal nature. 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 of communication and alliance of all civilizations and cultures.

According to some scholars, the alliance of civilizations theory at this stage of human 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 ideals that no one expected them to happen. But they did, thanks to the strong will of the people who believed wholeheartedly in progress and worked for it with all their strength and natural disposition for progress, growth and continuous renewal.

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 sustainable manner through conventional diplomacy and other methods that lacked transparency, sincerity and dedication.

## **Renewing the Human Civilizational Edifice**

Renewing the civilizational edifice of the world as one entity through communication and 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 human dignity is not violated nor human rights are abused; where the strong does not exploit the weak, where all abide by the rule of law and where the values of coexistence, tolerance and human kinship prevail.

The noble objectives of communication and alliance of civilizations deserve the sacrifices of its loyal champions who toil for the general benefit of humanity. These include respect for cultural and religious diversity, maintaining peace and security, as well as fighting poverty, deadly diseases, organized crime and

terrorism under all its forms, the exploitation of people, human rights abuses, the repression of free will and depriving people of their independence and freedom, drug trafficking, sexual exploitation, the spread of racial discrimination and feelings of ethnic supremacy, the production of mass destruction weapons, and the unnatural and immoral uses of genetic engineering.

These objectives are indisputably a major 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.

## **At the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum**

In January 2008, I took part in the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum held in Madrid. In my address to the Forum, I underlined that *“the core principle used by the Islamic world as a premise in laying down the bridges of dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions is elemental since it is inspired by the deeply-entrenched principles adhered to by the billion and a quarter people who believe in the message of Islam, a message of enlightenment, tolerance and brotherhood that believes in the commonality of human origin, the equality of all mankind in dignity and the right to life while enjoying security, peace, harmony and mutual understanding and respect.”*

On that occasion, I had to mention the origin of the initiative of the alliance of civilizations. In this respect, I explained that *“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 of its history.”*

In that address I delivered in the presence of the heads of the Spanish and Turkish governments, the UN Secretary General, and a host of ministers, high-level officials and directors general of international and regional organizations, I highlighted the Islamic perspective on the alliance of civilizations. In this connection, I pointed out that *“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 civilizations, 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.”*

## **At the Second Alliance of Civilizations Forum**

I also participated in the Second Alliance of Civilizations Forum held in Istanbul in 2009. On that occasion, I called for

further support for joint human action in a bid to foster dialogue of cultures and the alliance of civilizations, through sustained efforts at all levels in order 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. 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 inter-cultural 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 inter-state cooperation.

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, in defiance of international law, the universally shared lofty 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 lead a decent peaceful 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 in 1998, strongly 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 cultural differences and civilizational specificities.

## **At the Third Alliance of Civilizations Forum**

In my address to the plenary session of the Third Alliance of Civilizations Forum, held in Rio de Janeiro in May 2010, I underlined that the present juncture through which the world is wading emphasizes the necessity to spread the message of alliance among civilizations and enhance intercultural and inter-faith dialogue. I also explained that experience has demonstrated that the philosophy of the alliance of civilizations which evolved from pure theorization into practical terms is holding a message of peace to the world and prompts good-willed parties to work towards effecting change for the best within the areas of human life.

Meanwhile, I emphasized that this civilizational message needs to be spread at a larger extent around the world, via media, educational and cultural institutions, and religious preaching in such a way as to deeply entrench it in peoples' hearts, acts and dealings.

Addressing the Forum members, I said: *“We hold the common conviction that the application of the principles and the ideals of alliance in our daily life should be enhanced through a large base of the culture of dialogue in its deepest sense. The principles of*

*alliance will be mirrored in a set of projects driven by a universal civilizational mission. Accordingly, the daunting tasks to be fulfilled by this world forum of the Alliance of civilizations require the international community as a whole to intensify efforts to promote the concepts, the principles and the mission of the alliance and incorporate them into national policies.”* In the same vein, I argued that in that way, the goal behind the decision of the UN Secretary General to appoint a High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations seems to produce the desired results.

## **Incorporating the Alliance Principles into the UN Charter**

From the rostrum of the Rio de Janeiro Forum, I launched an appeal to the international community wherein I stressed that it should concur in incorporating the principles of the alliance of civilizations into the UN Charter, or that the United Nations General Assembly should issue a universal declaration on the alliance of civilizations to serve as an international legal umbrella for the momentous action undertaken by this world forum. I also underlined the need to involve representatives of the world civilizations in managing the alliance, devising its policies and programmes, and to take advantage of the capacities of the specialized international organizations operating under the auspices of the United Nations, in order to step up the endeavors made to this end by this world forum at all levels.

We, at ISESCO, do believe in the alliance of civilizations as a duty, a mission and a responsibility. Our organization pursues its action within the scope of its competence in order to foster dialogue among cultures and alliance of civilizations. It carries out a set of activities and programmes under its successive action

plans, both at the level of the Islamic world and at the level of communities and minorities within non-Member States. This falls in line with the second objective set forth in its Charter: namely, **“To consolidate understanding among peoples inside and outside the Member States and contribute to the achievement of world peace and security through various means, particularly through education, science, culture and communication.”**

Indeed, dialogue among cultures is the essential prelude to understanding among peoples which in its turn leads to positive communication and alliance of civilizations.

We have the conviction that more efforts to place dialogue and communication between civilizations and cultures at the core of East-West relations will provide ample opportunities for the international community to overcome problems and establish new and firm foundations for human cooperation to prosper.

While being convinced of the importance of focusing efforts on the promotion of dialogue, communication and alliance of civilizations at this delicate stage of human history, we also believe that the stability of relations between the Muslim world and the West is contingent upon remedying the injustices imposed on the Muslim peoples. This implies abstention from obstructing their efforts to acquire scientific and technological knowledge and exercise their right to fulfill the requirements of scientific excellence and technological strength in all areas. It also presupposes allowing them to establish the groundwork for a healthy political environment favoring social peace, civil concord, intercultural harmony, and cooperation, with no discrimination between individuals.

## **ISESCO's Vision of Dialogue of Civilizations**

We, at ISESCO, believe in dialogue, communication and alliance of civilizations as a strategic choice. It is the surest way conducive to stability and to the establishment of world peace and security. Within that framework we labor jointly with the international and regional organizations sharing the same interest, to disseminate the culture of justice and peace and promote respect for creative cultural diversity. Our action focuses on fostering mutual understanding and coexistence, developing the education curricula, especially education on human rights and civic values, and education of future generations on tolerance and mutual respect.

Yet there is a growing problem which undermines any action in this direction. That is the continuous Israeli occupation of Palestine and the Syrian Golan amid the international community's failure to deter the aggressors and put an end to occupation.

## **Destructive Chaos, Not Creative Chaos**

The attempt to plunge the Muslim world's countries into the so called "creative chaos" or any other of its forms is at odds with the principles of communication and alliance of civilizations. It actually runs counter to the will of peoples and seeks to sow the seeds of strife and wreak havoc in the world, and exacerbate extremism, bigotry, instability and contention, which constitute the best breeding ground for terrorism.

As such the so called "creative chaos", which was allegedly intended to bring about a new order where democracy, security and peace would prevail, has turned out to be an agent of destruction and terrorism.

The Muslim world, represented in the OIC, actually constitutes one civilizational bloc that advocates dialogue and communication between civilizations, and aspires for a better future, based on the values favoring human and civilizational development. It therefore is a driving force of peace coexistence and communication among civilizations and cultures. As for the West, we do not consider it as an opponent, and the Western civilization represents an edifying component of the universal civilization. Therefore all advocators of clash between this civilization and its Islamic counterpart are just distorting historical facts, thus acting against the will of the international community, and brandishing slogans whose empty charter and underlying ideology have eventually been laid bare.

## **Strengthening Relations between the Muslim World and the West**

Better relations between the Muslim world and the West are a prerequisite for a prosperous future. Maintaining the stability of those relations and protecting them against the dangers of excessive zeal and ill-conceived policies is a responsibility shared by all stakeholders as much as it is a universal and international duty. The Muslim world takes a great interest in developing those ties as much as it is committed to assuming its full responsibilities in this regard. This goes in line with the Muslim world's belief in the lofty universal values, its respect for international law, its compliance with its obligations regarding the international community, and its adoption of a moderate policy in its international relations.

In this connection, I would like to underline that maintaining stable relations between the Muslim world and the West is bene-

ficial not only for Muslim and Western peoples, but for humanity at large. It is therefore in the best interest of the entire international community to join efforts to ward off the dangers and crises looming over international relations. Here lies the responsibility of the United Nations, the five permanent members of the Security Council, and the European Union, since any dysfunction in international relations would only throw the international community into confusion and accordingly lead to worldwide instability.

Seen from this perspective, the Muslim world and the West are bound to keep open the channels of dialogue, rapprochement, communication, coexistence, and protection of mutual interest. To this end, they are required to work together for maintaining world peace and security, anchoring justice and concord and combating extremism on both sides by jointly promoting peace in the world. Such is the road to a better future where civilizations enter into alliance rather than clash.

Since the emergence of the alliance of civilizations movement, the world has faced various crises and challenges. The Palestinian people have been subjected to a brutal assault in the Gaza Strip, oppression in the West bank, while elections brought an extremist government to power in Israel which rejects the idea of a Palestinian State and continues to confiscate more lands and builds more settlements. Meanwhile, the situation in Afghanistan, Iraq and Somalia and in many other parts of the world has witnessed a serious downturn.

## **The Palestinian cause: the core of the problem**

Relations between the Muslim world and the West are severely undermined by Israel's continuous occupation of Palestine

and the Syrian Golan, together with the sufferings being inflicted on the Palestinian people, usurpation of their rights on top of which is their right to establish their independent State. The unlimited support to Israel by Western countries, particularly by the USA, and their indifference to its criminal practices and repetitive violation of international law have immensely contributed to those tense relations and fueled a widespread outrage among the Muslim world's population.

On the occasion of a visit to the West Bank some years ago, I had the opportunity to personally take stock of the cruel oppression being endured by the Palestinian people at the hands of the Israeli occupation authorities, and realize the extent of the ongoing profanation of Islamic and Christian sanctities there. The gravity of such oppressive and hostile practices is witnessing a rising trend year after year. Indeed, unless the international community takes concrete action to put an end to occupation, ensure protection for the Palestinian people against the Israeli oppression and materialize their right to establish their independent State, such a situation will continue to poison Muslim-West relations and could lead to troubles with unpredictable impacts on both sides. All we claim is a just a strict application of the UN relevant resolutions.

In this regard, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz, depicted this well in an article published in Britain's **FIRST** Magazine on the occasion of the penultimate G20 Summit<sup>(1)</sup> as he wrote, *“without the comprehensive and just peace in the region, there will be no meaning for talking about stability and economic growth and the development process will not take place. For this noble goal, the Arab countries introduced*

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1) Held in Toronto, Canada, 26-27 June 2010.

*their comprehensive and balanced initiative for peace "the Arab Peace Initiative" since 2002. But, the refusal of Israel wasted a great chance for achieving just and comprehensive peace in the region. We call on the international community to shoulder their responsibility to reach this long-awaited just and comprehensive peace and benefit from the introduced initiative which will not stay on the table forever."*

Such is the wisdom well expressed by the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques.

As such, dialogue among cultures, communication and alliance of civilizations 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 in line with the American Constitution, the UN Charter, human rights 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 at the Turkish parliament (Ankara, 6 April 2009) and to the Islamic World (Cairo University, 4 June 2009) will be mere words in the air as long as the Palestinian people remain under Israeli occupation.