



**II Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions
Astana, Kazakhstan 12-14 September 2006**



**Speech of
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Adviser of the
Chairman of the Alliance of
Civilizations**

Your excellencies,
Honorable authorities,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me and pleasure to address you and to convey to all of you the warmest greetings and regards from Prof. Federico Mayor, Co-Chair of the United Nations High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations. Greetings which are also extensive from the whole High Level Group (HLG) and especially from Prof. Mehmet Aydin, Co-Chair of the HLG and (Mohamed Khatami and) Rabbi Arthur Schneier, who (were) was supposed to be here today with us but could not finally attend.

This meeting, the II Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, is extremely timely and of utmost relevance and importance for the initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations. Therefore, our congratulations to the organizers.

As some of you may already know, the Alliance of Civilizations is a joint endeavour by Prime Minister Zapatero of Spain and Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey, which has been backed by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, by creating a High Level Group, composed of twenty personalities, which are due to present a report and a plan of action, in the coming months, on the essence of actions for the practical implementation of the principles of the Alliance.

Since the start of its work, the Alliance has already received a tremendous support from more than thirty states, several international organizations (the League of Arab States, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe - OSCE, UNESCO, the European Union, ISESCO, ALECSO, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the World Association of Mayors -UCLG, the World Tourism Organization, etc..) and from relevant international civil society networks, starting by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Indeed, just a few days ago, the 8th of September, the 60th General Assembly of the United Nations has approved its Global Strategy Against Terrorism, in which the Alliance of Civilizations is included as one of the key elements of this strategy.

The Alliance is deeply rooted in the principles of multilateralism, the centrality of the United Nations system in international relations, and of the respect of International Law. It is also guided by the inalienable principles enshrined by the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Moreover, as it is clearly stated in its Concept Paper, the Alliance of Civilizations aims to forge a collective political will to establish a paradigm of mutual respect between civilizations and cultures. The initiative takes into account the work done by previous initiatives such as the Global Agenda for Dialogue Among Civilizations and the Declaration and Plan of Action for Culture and Peace. The Alliance aims to launch a coalescing movement of the vast majority of peoples who do not identify themselves with extremism in various societies in order:

- To strengthen mutual understanding and respect in practical ways:
- To counter the influence of those who feed on exclusion and claim sole ownership of the truth:
- To counter, through such measures, the threat to world peace and stability that emanates from the trend towards extremism in societies;
- To promote awareness that security is indivisible and a vital need for all and that global cooperation is an indispensable prerequisite for both security and stability as well as development;
- To promote common values among different peoples, cultures and civilizations.

Dear authorities,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In this context, the role of religious leadership and of inter-religious dialogue is of the most critical importance. In this respect, please, let me share with you three of the multiple dimensions of this dialogue, which are of the primary attention in the work and objectives of the Alliance:

Firstly, the need to deepen common understanding and interaction between different faiths and beliefs in order to deconstruct misperceptions and misunderstandings, some of them deeply and century rooted, and reinforce their grand potential as instruments for a dialogue and peace.

Secondly, the immense responsibility of religious leaders at all levels from those in the highest posts to those who are daily in mosques, churches, temples, streets, in fostering a culture of understanding, respect to the differences, rejecting those who present us as enemies to believers of other confessions, of other traditions.

Thirdly, it is necessary to inform the people regardless whether they are believers or not, against those who misuse religion for their own objectives - either political, economical or social, resulting in violence or conflicts.

Finally, last but not least, I would like to extend an invitation to all of you to become active partners of the Alliance of Civilizations that we are establishing. We are convinced that with your advice and support, united yet diverse, we will be able to construct a solid global movement towards understanding, rejecting all kinds of extremism and based on common and shared values. Thank you.