

SUMMARY NOTES

MEETING OF THE HIGH LEVEL GROUP OF THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS
PALMA DE MALLORCA, SPAIN 27-29 NOVEMBER 2005

I. Participation

Participation in the first meeting of the High Level Group (HLG) of the “Alliance of Civilizations” included nineteen of the twenty members of the HLG.¹ The meeting, which opened with addresses by Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero of Spain and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan of Turkey, followed by an address from the UN Secretary-General delivered by his Special Adviser Mr. Iqbal Riza, and the Co-Chairs of the HLG, Professor Federico Mayor and Professor Mehmet Aydin. Several dignitaries representing the co-sponsoring governments of Spain and Turkey also attended, including Special Adviser to the Prime Minister of Spain Ambassador Máximo Cajal, Senior Diplomatic Advisor to the Prime Minister of Turkey Ambassador Rafet Akgünay, and the Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations Ambassador Juan Antonio Yáñez-Barnuevo. Professor Mahmood Mamdani, Special Adviser to the HLG, and Professor Mustapha Tlili, Adviser to the Director of the Secretariat of the Alliance also participated.

II. Opening

Several key insights were provided by the representatives of the co-sponsoring governments who opened the meeting.

Prime Minister Erdoğan traced the philosophical heritage of the Alliance to previous efforts aimed at bridging civilizations and cultures, notably the Dialogue Among Civilizations, while stating that the unique challenge for the Alliance would be to generate practical measures to address contemporary challenges. He noted in particular the challenge of successfully integrating immigrant populations of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds as one of the key challenges that the Alliance might seek to address. He also called on the Alliance to distinguish between those values which need to be consolidated and honored across all cultures, such as human rights and democratic governance, and those values which, being distinct to different cultures, contribute to the richness and potential of human existence and as such need to be protected and respected.

Prime Minister Rodríguez Zapatero emphasized the common destiny of all human beings and that diverse nations and communities must ally with one another in concerted action against all who use force to obtain their goals. Providing the European Union as an example of an entity that encompasses member nations who were once enemies, the Prime Minister stressed that no conflict is inevitable or permanent. Encouraging the Alliance to take a broad view of the groups with which it should work, he stressed that countering extremism will require an all-inclusive process that welcomes the involvement and contribution of diverse sectors of society - trade unions, religious leaders, opinion

¹ Professor Pan Guang of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences was unable to attend. He contributed to the HLG deliberations through a written statement that was read during the meeting.

makers, athletes and performers, scientists, inventors, and others. Drawing special attention to the disparities that exist between rich and poor, he noted that to be successful, any effort to isolate intolerance would have to address these growing disparities.

Following the orientation toward action established by the Prime Ministers, the members of the HLG deliberated over the following two days to develop both the conceptual framework of the problems they aim to address and the methodology they intend to pursue over the course of the next year.

III. Defining The Issue

The interdependence and overlapping nature of civilizations and cultures

HLG members strongly cautioned that presenting the work of the Alliance solely in terms of the state of relations between the Muslim World and the West would reinforce the mistaken notion that we live in a bi-polar world divided between mutually exclusive civilizations. HE Seyed Mohamed Khatami, noted that civilizations do not arise in a void nor do they survive in isolation, but only through interaction and engagement with one another. Ignoring this dynamic reinforces the line of thinking that leads to extremist thinking and action.

The multi-polarity and complex relationship of today's conflicts and challenges

Several HLG members voiced the concern that an exclusive focus on the dangers of terrorism risks ignoring issues that, particularly for populations in developing countries, are of equal or greater concern. These issues include the fate of indigenous populations in rapidly developing countries, the status and integration of immigrant populations in developed countries, and the already vast and growing gap in political, economic, and social power and well-being in the world. The suffering experienced by particularly vulnerable populations as a result of these trends can be overlooked when one focuses on terrorism as the sole form of violence to be combated in the world. To this point, Mr. Niasse suggested that an analysis of different forms of violence in modern times should be developed by the Alliance.

The incompatibility of religion with the practice of indiscriminate violence and terrorism

Archbishop Tutu urged HLG members to include in the final report to be presented to the UNSG by the end of 2006 a statement that "No religion advocates violence, propagates hatred, or seeks to promote injustice and oppression. Each religion, when at its best, promotes community, compassion, caring, gentleness, and sharing." This statement reinforced HE Seyed Khatami's view that, "It is in fact impossible for someone to be either a Jew, Christian, or Muslim and at the same time a terrorist", noting both the incompatibility of religion and terrorism and reinforcing the common ground between the three monotheistic faiths on this point. Rabbi Schneier noted that in previous meetings of diverse religious leaders, this point was expressed by the statement that "A crime perpetrated in the name of religion is a crime against that religion".

The prioritization of relations between the Muslim World and the West

Taken within the full recognition and acceptance of the first three points noted above, HLG members acknowledged that the priority issue for this particular initiative is the current state of relations between the Muslim world and the West, and how the issues that feed division and extremism in this relationship can be addressed constructively. In dealing with this relationship, HLG members warned against using inaccurate and confusing terminology, such as “Islamic-Western”, which equates a term referring to religion with one referring to geography, and against conflating terms such as Islamist and Islamicist, the former being a designation for a religio-political activist while the latter is a term used to describe experts on Islam.

Political and economic grievances based on the inequitable distribution of power and resentment of how that power is wielded

Archbishop Tutu stated that the asymmetry of power noted above, and the way in which power has been used to selectively apply international norms of behavior and international law, is feeding a sense of humiliation and resentment among many non-radicals in and outside of the Muslim world – a resentment which itself feeds radicalism.

Within the context of relations between the West and the Muslim world, the perception of double standards in the defense of human rights norms and international law is acute in several regions where Muslim populations are viewed as victims of aggression and violence perpetrated by non-Muslim populations. As noted by Mr. Charfi, these flashpoints of humiliation and resentment include the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the conflict in Chechnya, and the occupation of Iraq. Professor Esposito noted that, while some governments in the Arab world such as Qatar and Morocco are recognized for making significant strides toward greater respect for the rule of law, gender equity and the provision of educational opportunities to their populations, many other governments in the Middle East which receive support from Western governments are authoritarian in nature, providing an additional source for resentment among large Muslim populations.

The Alliance must address these issues and support those efforts that seek to resolve them constructively. Long-standing disputes and injustices that go unaddressed aid recruitment to extremist movements and terrorist organizations. Mr. Azoulay urged the identification of individuals who are non-violent champions for the just causes that have been appropriated by extremists.

Recognizing the Breadth and Depth of the Problems at Hand While Acknowledging the Possibility for Positive Change

While the problems noted above – particularly the economic and political grievances - pose daunting challenges, several participants noted signs of hope.

HE Seyed Khatami referenced the groundwork already laid by the Dialogue Among Civilizations initiative and noted that, as a result of how poor the current situation is, there is a growing common sense realization that we are less secure than we were just a few years ago, and a resulting openness to explore better approaches to our differences.

This realization may benefit the Alliance of Civilizations and allow it to develop further off of the basis established by the Dialogue Among Civilizations and related efforts.

IV. What Can Be Done: Establishing and Mobilizing a Counter-Narrative

Drawing on the analysis of the issues at hand, which began in Mallorca and is to be continued by the High Level Group in subsequent meetings, HLG members generated some initial ideas on what could be done, either by the Alliance itself, or by others with support from the Alliance.

The prevailing Western narrative in international relations largely based on the prioritization by Western governments of combating terrorism emanating from the Muslim world is as organized and pervasive as the narratives promulgated by various groups in the Muslim world due to long standing injustices, social, political and economic dominations and grievances. These narratives are also used by the extremists for the justification of their violent actions that are usually carried out in the name of religion. Countering these narratives will involve a concerted and organized effort which requires mobilizing intellectuals, civil society, and multi-lateral institutions and resources. HH Shaikha Mozah raised the urgent need to mobilize a counter narrative to these unfounded generalizations and stereotypes as well as extremism; the notion of counter-narrative was quickly taken up and developed by the entire HLG.

Establishing a Counter Narrative Through Research and Through Actions That Reach and Engage Populations

Professor Mamdani noted that one aspect of the counter-narrative that the Alliance could help establish would be a long-term, on-going, and evolutionary process of research and publication based on the premises that civilizations are not mutually exclusive and that an individual may participate in and identify with multiple civilizations and traditions. In the near-term, the Secretariat could provide the primary information for such research to be advanced, particularly with regard to dynamics that have accelerated in recent years, such as growing inequities in the distribution of wealth and power and the rise in the description of conflicts along religious and cultural lines (i.e. the language of identity rather than that of interests). Mr. Charfi pointed out that moderate scholars, journalists, theologians, and research nodes will be important resources. The Alliance will seek to provide support for existing efforts in the form of completing translations, providing fora for discussions, and networking those already working in this field. As this effort is pursued, Professor Esposito urged that the Alliance not conflate the term “moderate” with the terms “liberal” or “secular” to ensure that the Alliance engages those with conservative interpretations and practice of their faith.

Because efforts that touch the lives of broader populations in more immediate ways are both required and expected of the Alliance, it was suggested that the Alliance pursue the development of initiatives that are both readily accessible by and engaging of mass populations.

Mr. Azoulay noted that populations in Muslim countries – particularly young populations – are looking to the Alliance with expectations and hopes which the Alliance should seek to meet with initiatives that are both visible and that touch on their daily lives and concerns.

In this light, Mr. Alatas suggested that a distinction be made between the long-term effort to establish the intellectual and philosophical framework and basis for this counter-narrative on the one hand, and shorter-term initiatives that seek to demonstrate this counter-narrative in ways that reach and engage common people and mass populations. He noted that both are important, but the latter may be particularly helpful in facilitating implementation of the Alliance’s recommendations.

Some participants drew attention to the phenomenon of growing Islamophobia and the equation of terror not only with individual Muslims but with the religion of Islam itself, and the related erosion of certain civil liberties for Muslim populations living in the West, all of which were points of concern raised by Prime Minister Erdoğan in his opening remarks. Rabbi Schneier suggested that the Alliance consider advancing the idea of a UN Declaration Against Islamophobia to be developed and adopted.

Reacting to these diverse views, Professor Aydin encouraged HLG members that the Alliance could accomplish both objectives: initiating a long-term effort of intellectual research and exploration (which will also yield products and outputs in the near term) while at the same time proposing and developing efforts that may have a more immediate impact on larger populations.

V. Privileged Fields of Action, and Targeted Audiences

Some ideas for themes to explore and even specific recommendations and outcomes to consider were made by HLG members. Among the major themes that HLG members identified were:

- Education (formal and informal)
- Media and Communications
- Youth
- Migration and Indigenous Populations
- Women

Education: Several participants stressed the need for the production and dissemination of educational materials that teach about diverse faiths and cultures as well as the diversity within cultures and religions. At the same time, it was noted by HH Shaikha Mozah and by Dr. Sadik that even in many cases where good materials and texts are available, they are often misused by the teachers responsible for imparting their lessons to students. Ms. Armstrong added that in some cases, “lazy teaching” by supposed religious teachers who are charismatic but shallow in terms of their scholarship has filled the void in deeper religious education and instruction. Therefore, the training of educators and teachers –

both those in religious education and those in public school systems – requires particular attention.

Media and Communications: Several participants made the point that formal educational systems are only the site for a portion of the lessons that young people learn. Informal education, particularly as present in the vast media sector to which growing numbers have access (including the internet), is a major force and, as Ms. Bharthia noted, often a polarizing one. Participants agreed that particularly in times of violent conflict or crisis, the messages of extremists are effective and alluring, particularly to young people, and that an equally compelling message needs to be developed and cultivated to prevent the further recruitment of youth to extremist movements. Participants discussed the possibilities of either launching a television station or partnering with existing stations to broadcast programming that bridges differences, educates populations about one another, portrays different cultures and civilizations in their diversity, and promotes tolerance within and between them. HH Shaikha Mozah offered the use of the newly-established Children’s Television channel on Al-Jazeera as a possible outlet for such programming. Noting the importance of the internet, particularly for youth populations, Professor Naumkin suggested working through those web-sites that are already popular with the audiences that the Alliance seeks to reach (as distinct from the planned Alliance-specific website to be launched and managed by the Secretariat) in order to avoid the perception of the Alliance as an initiative driven solely by the UN or from forces external to the populations it seeks to reach.

Youth: Several participants stressed the importance of involving youth leaders and networks in both the research and the development of recommendations for the Alliance. Mr. Azoulay recommended that initiatives be developed and recommended which “promote and offer solidarity” with young people and their concerns. He noted in particular that the just causes for which young Muslims across the world share concern (i.e. opposition to the occupation of lands with predominantly Muslim populations and to the support by some Western governments of authoritarian regimes in predominantly Muslim countries) have largely been appropriated by extremists. Until more moderate voices can be viewed by young people as standing for and advancing these same causes, it will be difficult to prevent the recruitment of young people to extremist groups and movements, and the Alliance should therefore seek to promote and provide platforms for such voices. Mr. Niasse added that issues of environmental protection, which are of great concern to young populations, should also be included in the research and development of recommendations considered by the Alliance. Adding to this point, Mr. Vedrine noted that the impact on future generations of the continued degradation and destruction of the environment is so great that it threatens human survival. Speaking to environmental issues, but also more broadly to the question of how to support and expand youth activism, HH Shaikha Mozah made reference to the idea of a Youth Solidarity Corps, which would engage young people across cultures, regions, and religions in cooperative efforts to address global problems.

The Impact of Globalization on Immigrant and Indigenous Populations: Several HLG members made the point that in an era of rapid and asymmetrical development, the most

difficult transitions and hardships are those faced by indigenous populations and immigrant populations. Participants suggested that the Alliance study those countries where the transition from “developing” to “developed” country status has proceeded without mass violence or a rise in extremism. Professor Naumkin mentioned Turkey and Southeast Asian countries such as Malaysia as sites where the transition to modernity has been relatively successful and suggested that lessons could be learned from studying their experiences. Mr. Iglesias and Professor Mendes suggested similar studies be commissioned on both the successes and failures of these processes in South America, particularly as related to the impact of development on indigenous populations. With regard to immigration, Ms. Bhartia suggested that the Alliance identify affirmative action practices and related policies which have led to the successful integration of immigrant populations in regions that experience mass immigration such as Europe and the US. Further research in each of these areas would be instructive of how the process of development can be managed in ways that protect both indigenous and immigrant populations and that allow them to share its benefits.

Women:

Participants noted that the lack of educational opportunities and programs for women presents challenges both for those women and for larger societies in terms of the informal education of new generations. Dr. Sadik noted that women, constituting half of the population of the world, are often subjected to discriminatory laws and that the analysis of the Alliance into the causes of terrorism and extremism should include the causes and effects of gender discrimination, how it is practiced in different forms across many different cultures, and how it is or could be countered effectively.

VII. Going Forward – Alliance Methodology & Action:

To provide the information for HLG members to generate recommendations, the Alliance Secretariat is preparing a workplan. HLG members made several points regarding the plan:

Drawing on Existing Materials, Research, and Declarations

The HLG asked that an inventory of resolutions and declarations already adopted by governmental bodies or conferences and by multi-lateral institutions such as the UN on matters pertinent to the themes noted above be made available by the Secretariat. (Relevant UN documents include the UN Charter (1945), the UNESCO Charter (1945), the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Declaration on violence (1985), the Declaration of Religious Leaders Concerning a Culture of Peace (1994), the Declaration of the Principles on Tolerance (1995), the Declaration on the Dialogue Among Civilizations (1998), the Declaration and Program on a Culture of Peace (1999), the Declaration on Cultural Diversity (2001), the UN Summit Declaration (2005), and the Report of the Global Commission on International Migration (2005).

Research

The Alliance Secretariat was tasked with researching each of the major themes identified by the HLG as most important to the mission of the Alliance, beginning with a surveying effort to take stock of the existing information already existing. Research efforts are to be carried out under the guidance of the HLG and its co-chairs, and by the Alliance Secretariat as well as by relevant research centers and partner institutions to be identified as necessary and appropriate. Special attention is to be paid by the Secretariat of the Alliance to solicit input from influential and important sectors of society that are often neglected in such efforts – including youth movement leaders, religious activists with strong popular followings, independent intellectuals, and activists and experts who are in close contact with the populations that the Alliance seeks to reach.

Regional Hearings and Meetings

In order to enrich the exchange and development of ideas between the four planned HLG plenary meetings, regional hearings should be organized. These would be opportunities to invite the perspectives and ideas of government figures, representatives of international governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations engaged in work that is relevant to the goals of the Alliance, and independent intellectuals. Among locations represented by HLG members, Brazil, Russia, South Africa, and Egypt together with UN Regional Offices were all mentioned as possible locations for such meetings and consultations.

In addition, several organizations and venues that may be useful to consult or partner with for such regional meetings were mentioned, including Academie de la Latinité, the Conference on Indigenous Cultures, the Islamic Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (ISESCO - Rabat), The Arab League, The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), The European Union, the EuroMed Initiative, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)...

Alliance of Civilizations Website

HLG members noted that the internet provides a useful tool for the Alliance's work and that, in addition to working with existing websites, the Alliance should prepare a website to publicize its goals and methods, to disseminate the results of its research as it progresses, to make available information on related research, declarations, and fora already completed or underway, to provide an input mechanism for those wanting to contribute to the HLG's deliberations, and to provide a platform for those voices that are already advancing the goals of the Alliance in the areas noted in this document (Education, Media and Communications, Youth, Women, and the Impact of Globalization on Indigenous and Immigrant Populations).

Addressing National Legislatures and Policy-Oriented Bodies

Professor Mendes noted the importance of meeting with legislative, policy-making, and policy-advising bodies. Mr. Alatas stressed the importance of developing more fora in which religious and cultural leaders can meet with political leaders and government representatives to discuss the issues the Alliance aims to address.

Guest Speakers and Advisors

There were several suggestions for how to integrate guest speakers into future HLG meetings. It was agreed that between two to four guest speakers would likely be invited to the next HLG meeting to feed into the deliberations of the HLG on the issues it is considering.

Dealing with the Media

Separate from the recommendations regarding the media that the HLG will be developing, the question of how the Alliance should interact with the media over the course of the next year was discussed by HLG members. Participants agreed that individual HLG members are both free and encouraged to engage with the media to advance the goals of the Alliance. Moreover, press briefings will likely be shared with media outlets at future HLG meetings. Upon the request of the co-chairs, the Secretariat will share with the HLG information about media events and contacts it receives. Once the HLG is prepared to advance its recommendations, it may revisit the question of whether to produce materials and media-ready messages via TV programs, spokespeople, booklets, etc.

Future Meetings of the High level Group

The schedule of future HLG meetings is as follows:

HLG Meeting II: 26-28 February, 2006 in Doha, Qatar

HLG Meeting III: 28-30 May, 2006 in a location to be decided

HLG Meeting IV: Early September or late October in Turkey pending consultations with the offices of the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey and the Secretary-General of the UN