



**Alliance of Civilizations
Group of Friends Meeting
(14 December 2007, ECOSOC Chamber)**

Summary report

The objective of the Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) Group of Friends Meeting was to provide an overview of the AoC's activities since September 2007 and to update the Group of Friends members on current developments, particularly related to the preparations of the First AoC Forum in Madrid, Spain (January 15-16, 2008), its expected outcomes and future initiatives; and the status of the AoC Voluntary Trust Fund. The Meeting also provided an opportunity for Group of Friends members to exchange views and suggestions to be followed up by the AoC during and after the First AoC Forum.

A report on the Alliance of Civilizations and the Asia-Pacific Symposium held in New Zealand under the Prime Minister Clark's auspices on May 23-24, 2007 was circulated at the meeting.

Opening remarks

The meeting of the Group of Friends was opened by President Jorge Sampaio, High Representative for the AoC.

- Based on the feedback President Sampaio has received during numerous high-level meetings in the preceding months, it is clear that the AoC is generating high expectations and can make a difference given its agenda, approach and aims (the three "A"s).
- The High Representative discussed the AoC position as an additional horizontal instrument within the UN and highlighted three conditions required to make the AoC initiative sustainable: 1) strong support and commitment by States to the AoC goals, 2) development of partnerships with relevant international bodies and 3) close cooperation of the AoC with the non-state actors (NGOs, private sector, local communities, religious institutions, youth organizations and networks, etc.), which also play a leading role in peace building at the grassroots level.
- President Sampaio presented the objectives of the First AoC Forum and provided an update on preparations for it. He pointed out that the Forum will be used to hold a high-level debate on the way forward for the Alliance, an agenda and a format of which to be circulated on or shortly after 28 December, 2007.
- President Sampaio reminded Group of Friends members about the importance of elaborating the "National Strategies for cross-cultural dialogue" on the country level, focusing on four main areas of action – media, youth, education and migration. He expressed an expectation that after the Forum an AoC Directory of Focal Points (list of names of designated officials with knowledge of both government and civil society actors and networks in his or her country or organization) who will be responsible for coordinating all activities relating to the Alliance and its goals within his or her government or organization, will be available.
- President Sampaio closed his opening remarks by thanking those countries that have contributed to the AoC Voluntary Trust Fund and urging others to contribute as well.

President Sampaio then gave the floor to H.E. Ambassador Juan Antonio Yañez-Barnuevo, Permanent Representative of Spain to the United Nations.

- Ambassador Yañez-Barnuevo provided an overview on the practicalities of the upcoming AoC Forum, including the Forum agenda and logistical support, level of the participants who already confirmed their presence at the Forum, etc.
- The Ambassador briefed the Group of Friends members on the flow of three plenaries at the Forum (first, second and closing), working sessions and a breakfast working group, their objectives and expected outcomes; strategic issues to be discussed during the Forum and the expected announcements to be made.
- He informed the participants that the state of preparations of the Forum is very advanced; more details are available on the websites of the AoC (www.unaoc.org) and the First AoC Forum (www.madridaocforum.org).

Within the general discussion, statements were made by representatives of (in alphabetical order) Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, the Council of Europe, Egypt, El Salvador, Greece, International Organization for Migration (IOM), ISESCO, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Pakistan, Portugal, Russia, Slovenia, and Tanzania. The participants reiterated their countries' and/or organizations' commitment and strong support for the AoC initiative and appreciated the update on the progress of the AoC Forum arrangements. Several representatives confirmed that their countries and/or organizations will be sending delegations to the Forum.

Enquiries and observations

- The AoC was requested to provide the criteria applied in the selection of non-state actors invited to the Forum and was asked about a possibility to invite additional individuals. The AoC Secretariat Acting Director explained that non-state actors make up the majority of the invitees and were selected after extensive and close consultations with a large number of AoC partners, including partners identified for each working session to be held at the Forum. Those selected hold a position as leaders of organizations, corporations, or networks of action-driven initiatives concerned with intercultural and/or inter-religious dialogue in one or more of the 4 priorities areas of the AoC. The rate of response has been thus far very high and more confirmations are expected. Therefore, while the prospect of additional invitees has not been completely closed, no commitments to expand the invitation list could be made at this time. In the meantime, however, the AoC Secretariat is open to consider suggested names.
- Tanzania, as a co-chair with Finland of the Helsinki Process, mentioned that most themes of the Forum concur with the Helsinki Process' objectives and that it would like to propose some participants for the Forum. Ambassador Yañez-Barnuevo responded that while both Tanzania and Finland have been already invited, the host Government for the Forum is open to discuss other names suggested by the Helsinki Process.

Commitments and announcements

- The Council of Europe and ISESCO announced that partnerships with each of their organizations are currently being discussed with the AoC.
- The Netherlands would like to see national strategies presented in Madrid.

- Egypt, Brazil and The Netherlands pledged to contribute to the AoC Voluntary Trust Fund. Portugal is considering pledging as well.
- Pakistan informed that it would like to include in the Forum agenda several proposals put forward by the OIC to bridge divides, particularly to fight Islamophobia.
- Slovenia and Argentina, respectively, announced events to be held in 2008 with the aim to advance intercultural and inter-religious dialogue.
- El Salvador is preparing to make a presentation on youth violence and reintegration at the Forum.

**List of countries and organizations,
represented at the AoC Group of Friends Meeting**

In alphabetical order: Albania, Algeria, Argentina, Austria, Australia, Bahrain, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Council of Europe, Denmark, Egypt, El Salvador, European Commission, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, IOM, IPU, ISESCO, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, League of Arab States, Lithuania, Luxemburg, Malaysia, Mexico, Montenegro, Mozambique, The Netherlands, New Zealand, OIC, Oman, Pakistan, Peru, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, Republic of Korea, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovenia, Sweden, Switzerland, Tanzania, Thailand, Tunisia, UNESCO, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, Yemen.