

United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Group of Friends Ministerial Meeting

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Statement by

The Honorable Dr. Tonio Borg

Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs

Mr. President,

Once again, the UN General Assembly is providing us with a fitting background for this year's meeting of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations. Indeed, these annual gatherings provide us with the opportunity to come together to share and exchange views on issues of mutual interest and concern.

I must take this opportunity to thank you, Mr. President, for your hard work and untiring efforts in leading our Alliance.

As an active member of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations, Malta is looking forward to engage further with partners from different regions and to contribute constructively towards the promotion of a fruitful dialogue. Malta's vocation is to continue to strive to stem prejudices and overcome obstacles which hinder and jeopardize the harmonious interaction between peoples of diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and religious beliefs. In achieving this goal, a concerted effort is required towards a process which affords a sufficient amount of visibility to win both minds and hearts of our peoples.

With recurrent tensions threatening peace and security in the Euro-Mediterranean region, compounded by polarizing debates within and between its societies, we need to urgently support efforts and initiatives that would enhance the people to people approach to continue to strengthen on-the-ground efforts and cooperation with a view to sowing the seeds of reconciliation and understanding. In this context, we should embark on further efforts to also enhance good governance, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue among and between Mediterranean States. The Mediterranean region is not only of vital importance to Mediterranean countries, but it also has a crucial role to play on the global scenario. In this regard, Malta intends to continue to highlight the importance of the Mediterranean region, not only during regional discussions, but also at the international level.

As part of this vocation and contribution towards these ideals, Malta is being honoured and privileged to host the first Alliance of Civilizations Regional Conference for the Mediterranean on 8-9 November 2010. During this meeting, all countries from the region, as well as a substantial group of international organizations have been invited to attend. The Conference will also see the adoption of the Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean and the Action Plan, paving the way for innovative projects and initiatives aimed at strengthening intercultural dialogue and cooperation. We are also extremely encouraged by the fact that members of the civil society will also be present for this meeting.

The primary aims of the Strategy are those of contributing to the general ongoing efforts to bring relevant cultural, economic, social and political stakeholders together from both sides of the Mediterranean, promote mutual understanding and improved perceptions of each other, defuse tensions and bridge divides, enhance security and human development, and foster good neighbourly relations among societies, institutions and individuals in the Mediterranean region.

We all recognize the fact that the Mediterranean region is facing a number of challenges in terms of contrasts and negative trends. However, our commitment to act upon the situation by investing time

in the drafting and adoption of these documents shows that we all agree that such hurdles are not at all insurmountable. The Alliance has proved itself to be an invaluable asset in this regard, a driving-force in strengthening cooperative relations among people, cultures, religions and nations, and has provided us with solid foundations to build upon.

We should therefore feel encouraged to further intensify our collective efforts with a good degree of confidence and hope. The successful outcome of this process should be a great source of accomplishment for all of us. At the same time, it is also our duty and responsibility to continue to do our utmost in order to ensure the Strategy's success, and to provide the right conditions for long-lasting effects. We do not regard the Malta Conference as the end of a process, but rather, as an important milestone towards a more stable and secure Mediterranean Region. The launching of the Regional Strategy for the Mediterranean and the Action Plan does not equate to the end of responsibility on our side. Indeed, it actually means that we will now have a formal commitment and obligation to nurture this initiative and help it grow.

The AoC Regional Conference for the Mediterranean in Malta will also be providing a platform for frank exchanges between and among representatives of our region. Furthermore, it will hopefully leave an indelible mark in our inter-cultural dialogue process.

Mr. President,

I am confident that we will be all working hard in order to ensure that the Malta Conference in November will be a successful one. In this regard, Malta is counting on all our partners to contribute towards a successful and fruitful outcome. Malta also strongly believes that we need to send out a strong and clear message to the region, and even beyond, highlighting the fact that our commitment to the peace and stability in the Mediterranean is real and authentic.

A strong commitment today will pay dividends to our Peoples and to our future generations.

Thank you.