31 May 2012

Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly, at the Partners forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations

Your Excellency Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Prime Minister of Turkey,
Your Excellency Gonzalo de Benito, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs of Spain,
Your Excellency Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General,
Your Excellency High Representative Jorge Sampaio,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am pleased to attend this important Partners Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations, and to address this high level segment of the forum.

We have just heard a comprehensive presentation from High Representative Sampaio on the objectives of the Forum and the important role that the Alliance plays for our common future.

I wish to thank the Turkish Government for its kind invitation, and I commend the leadership of Prime Minister Erdoğan for his commitment to the Alliance since its inception.

Holding this forum in Istanbul is particularly meaningful.

This historic and beautiful city, with its ethnic and cultural diversity, has for centuries illustrated the spirit and principles of the Alliance.

I am a strong believer in the Alliance of Civilizations.

It is my deeply held conviction that the mission of the Alliance reflects the mission of the United Nations itself:

To build peace through dialogue.

Convinced that cultural diversity, mutual knowledge and understanding foster mutual respect, and recognizing the need to build bridges among civilizations, the international community in 2005, at the urging of Turkey and Spain, launched the Alliance.

The General Assembly has since expressed its full support for the Alliance, and today I am delighted that the Group of Friends of the Alliance includes 107 Member States. I hope the full Membership will join soon.

Through its various activities, the Alliance of Civilizations is contributing to the maintenance of international peace and security.

In today's interconnected world, we cannot underestimate the power of such a contribution.

In the face of growing intolerance, xenophobia, and incitement, the Alliance has a more daunting task than ever before in dealing with these phenomena, in accordance with international law.

To build harmony and foster peace among civilizations, we must consider the following questions:

Why is culture perceived as a source of division, instead of a path to dialogue and human solidarity?

Why has multiculturalism failed and xenophobia risen in some societies?

I would submit that we have entered a world in which these issues will continue to unsettle us, unless we realize the benefits of diversity and share the fruits of globalization in a just and harmonious way between all members of the human family.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Following the Madrid, Istanbul and Rio Forums, the fourth forum of the Alliance was held last December in my hometown of Doha.

It focused on the interconnection between diversity and development.

The Forum recognized that without the full contribution of women, youth, media, and immigrant groups, there can be no true development and therefore there can be no true peace.

As the UN acknowledges, in today's world, development, peace and security, and human rights are interlinked and mutually reinforcing.

We are looking forward to the next forum that will be hosted by Austria next year.

I am certain that, like the previous fora, the Vienna Forum will produce other creative, forward-looking ideas.

At this point, let me also commend Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon for his untiring efforts to advancing the Alliance, including through High Representative Mr. Sampaio.

As part of my support and commitment to the Alliance, I convened a one-day thematic debate of the General Assembly on 22 March.

We thoroughly discussed with Ministers, eminent personalities, UN officials, academics and youth leaders, the challenges that we all face in fostering cross-cultural understanding and dialogue.

At the meeting, we considered the impact of new information and communication technologies on our societies.

The summary of this meeting was brought to the attention of the whole UN Membership.

At the high-level meeting of the General Assembly on mediation, organized last week also at my initiative, we considered the role of the Alliance as a complementary tool for mediating disputes.

This meeting was part of a series of events I have convened under my Presidency.

Interfaith issues are very close to my heart. During my tenure as Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar, I carried forth the strategic policy of my country at the UN and in Doha, convening many interfaith, diversity and Alliance-related forums.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We come together today because of a common belief that the work of the Alliance of Civilizations deserves our full support.

Knowing we are among friends, let me therefore be frank:

In order to play its full role, the Alliance must be strengthened.

The Alliance must be strengthened so it can more effectively diffuse tensions, prevent misunderstandings (particularly when they arise from cultural grievances), and build civil society networks for peace.

To support the work of the Alliance, the Alliance must assume a holistic approach and engage the various strata of society, including civil society, private sector and academia.

Through the Alliance of Civilizations, we are given a chance to elevate our consideration of issues of peace and security to a high level of universality, and I hope, to a high level of effectiveness.

For this reason, this Partners Forum is most timely.

I would encourage participants to show their utmost support, including their financial support.

I sincerely hope, and believe, that through this meeting, we will garner the required support and necessary resources.

In closing, I would again thank the Government of Turkey for hosting this important meeting, and I hope that we will see the desired results. Thank you.