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THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS – AN INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT HUMAN FRATERNITY

Today the delicate mosaic of our civilizations remains under threat. We live in a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual world where multilateralism should prevail. Paradoxically multilateralism is being questioned at a time when we need it most. To regain people's trust, we need to have effective multilateralism.

As a true advocate of the value of multilateralism, I believe that we need new forms of cooperation with other international and regional organizations, an inclusive multilateralism, within the UN at its centre, but with closer links with civil society, religious leaders, women, academia and You... the young people who are fresh with new ideas and well-informed mindsets. When multilateralism is inclusive, it will trickle down to the masses.

With the complex global challenges our world is facing today, particularly the threat of global terrorism and violent extremism, I cannot think of any other way to deal with these challenges other than the global responses that has in its core an inclusive multilateralism.

Allow me to touch on the work of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations against this context:

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations remains an ardent defender of inclusiveness and efficient multilateralism through the promotion of intercultural and interfaith dialogue. Our mantra is "Many Cultures, One Humanity". We have to recognize that there is a pluralism of civilizations. Each and every one of them has contributed to enriching reaching our common and single humanity. There is unity and richness in our diversity. Allow me to refer here to the founder of the United Nations, the late Dag Hammarskjöld whose wisdom and vision still inspire all of us until today. He firmly believed in the richness that diversity brings to our world. When he was asked what was his favourite book he said "Cervantes Don Quixote".

Sadly, this spirit is missing today. Instead we are witnessing white supremacist rhetoric, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and discrimination spreading like wildfire across the dark web.

The terrorist attacks on Muslims praying in 2 mosques in Christchurch in New Zealand was a blatant a reminder that our work is far from being done. White supremacist slur was not confined to targeting Muslims alone. Robert Bowers rampantly killed 11 Jewish people in the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh last October. He blamed Jews for bringing invaders to the US, in reference to refugees. In January, a bomb attack at Jolo Cathedral in Sulu in the Philippines killed Christian worshippers during Sunday mass.

The Christchurch massacre shook everyone to the core. But it also reminded us that as we continue our global counter-terrorism efforts, it is equally important to safeguard religious sites and guarantee the safety of worshippers who share a spirit of compassion and love.

The UN Secretary-General was right on target when on March 23 he made a global call to reaffirm to sanctity of all places of worship and the safety of all worshippers who visit revered sites in a spirit of compassion and tolerance. I feel privileged to be tasked with developing an Action Plan for the UN to be fully engaged in support of safeguarding religious sites.

This mandate seemed timely and urgent because a month later another attack happened in Sri Lanka, where the Catholic community was targeted with more than 200 people killed.

There are different – and often competing – conceptions of human fraternity in contemporary political philosophy.

So, in preparation for this conference, I drew inspiration from Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights – the magna carta of all humankind – which states, "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood".

All the prophets and religious messengers throughout history have preached a similar message of peace, love and fraternity. For instance, the dignity of all human beings in Islam derives from our common humanity, regardless of race, creed, colour or gender. Islam views the world as a single family with global citizenship the basis for co-operation and peaceful coexistence. Islam is a faith of tolerance, a faith of humanism that is important to recognize when we talk about Islam today.

I quote from the Holy Quran, Surat Al-Hujrat: "Oh, mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other."

And these values are not limited to the scriptures of the three monotheistic religions. They are cherished by all the world's major religions and faiths.

In short, human fraternity is about recognizing each other as equals by virtue of our shared humanity. I must add: human fraternity is genuine when it emanates from respect of the other.

Yet, in all corners of the world, we see an erosion of these universal values and growing social and cultural divides. And this is quite ironical. Because one would have expected that in today's multipolar, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic world, multilateralism would prevail and people would be more cosmopolitan. Instead, tribalism, ethnic violence, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, hate speech and ultra-nationalism, are in full swing. Atrocity crimes continue to shock the conscious of humanity. Look no further than the suffering of the Yazidi or the plight of the Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar. Religious and ethnic minorities are still among the world's most vulnerable groups, particularly in situations of armed conflict.

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And there is little doubt that women and girls throughout the world continue to suffer simply because of their gender.

These challenges represent a stark reality. They are testing the resilience of local communities and undermining trust in our institutions.

Today, however, we have an opportunity to demonstrate our shared responsibility and practical commitment to reclaim the notion of universal fraternity as the bedrock of international cooperation. I recall the message of His Holiness, Pope Francis, for the 47th World Day for Peace, “fraternity is the foundation and pathway of peace”. Quoting Pope Saint Paul VI, he noted that, not only individuals but nations too, through mutual understanding and cooperation, must encounter one another in a spirit of fraternity to build a common future for all humanity.

Allow me to touch on a few pragmatic approaches to move this paradigm forward:

1. *The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, the organization that I have just started to lead 3 weeks ago, remains an ardent defender of inclusiveness and efficient multilateralism.* Against the diversity of global, interconnected challenges, our responses must transcend national borders. Our mantra is “Many Cultures, One Humanity”. We have to recognize that there is a pluralism of civilizations. Each and every one of them has contributed to enriching our common and single humanity. There is unity and richness in our diversity. At the same time, we need to cultivate new forms of cooperation – based on genuine inclusivity – with other international and regional organizations, civil society, global thought leaders and the private sector.

Religious leaders and faith-based organizations of all denominations have a key role to play in our multilateral order. My office remains particularly committed to promoting inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue as a tool for combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, and incitement to violence against persons based on religion or belief.

2. *Inclusive citizenship, where individuals enjoy equal opportunities and rights, whatever their gender, religion, or ethnic background is a key enabler of peaceful coexistence.*

The Marrakesh Declaration, and its promotion of new jurisprudence on inclusive citizenship, provides a powerful and useful reference. Individually and collectively, we should ensure that the Declaration and its Framework receive greater visibility and help support its implementation.

But inclusive citizenship alone is not a panacea. Ethnic and religious minorities in all regions continue to face discrimination and new threats. Whether in the form of violent extremist attacks or because of exclusionary policies promoted by ultra nationalist groups.

Beyond classical conception of citizenship, we should seek to establish a culture of peace from an early age. Where people of different identities, faiths and cultures can identify as global citizens.

I truly believe that Global Citizenship Education is the best vehicle to instil these values. For this reason, the Alliance will support Member States in developing curriculum that includes an understanding of, and respect for, the plurality of religions, cultures and societies. We will help equip students with the skills to challenge bigotry, division, and ignorance. Global Citizenship Education represents an important tool in our collective efforts to achieve peaceful coexistence. Let’s strive to ensure that global cit-

izenship education remains universal in scope, and local in impact.

3. *Turning to terrorism and violent extremism.* At present, Da’esh, its affiliates and other terrorist groups are weakened. Nevertheless, their intolerant ideology – kept alive, in part, by the return and relocation of foreign terrorist fighters – continues to resonate, particularly among young people.

A key component of our prevention agenda is addressing root causes and grievances that are so often manipulated by terrorists and their supporters. Again, this requires our collective resolve. We need to rely on the support of religious leaders, teachers and educators, human rights activists and the media.

In the case of terrorists and violent extremists who cite religious belief as the justification for their activities, it is necessary to expose their falsehoods and distortions with the testimony of credible religious leaders and faith-based actors. This involves supporting and empowering young religious leaders with faith-based critical thinking tools to deconstruct perverse messages and to help identify signs of radicalization in local communities.

And we need to extend our fraternal solidarity with the victims of terrorism, their families and communities. Following a terrorist attack, we seldom hear about surviving families, friends and communities, and the impact that terrorism will have on their lives. Too often, the perpetrators of terrorist acts dominate the headlines. We can and should do more to remember and support victims of terrorism in all regions of the world.

The United Nations General Assembly recently established an International Day of Remembrance and Tribute to the victims of terrorism to be observed every year on August 21.

My office will continue to support the efforts of Member States in building a narrative of remembrance and solidarity that incorporates the story and experiences of the victims of terrorism. I am confident that our solidarity will help facilitate common understanding and social cohesion. These testimonies will also expose future generations to the barbaric and criminal nature of terrorism.

4. *And finally, defending the rights of the oppressed and persecuted involves bringing the perpetrators of atrocity crimes to justice, within a human rights and rule of law framework.* This is the only way to end a cycle of impunity. Accountability for past crimes is necessary for restoring dignity to victims. It also paves the path for reconciliation and prevention of future atrocities.

We are all united by common bonds, our cultures woven together in a shared heritage. But for universal fraternity to flourish, basic levels of freedom, equality, and political inclusion should exist in every society. Acting upon and accepting our shared responsibilities and principles to turn this vision into reality requires broader, deeper and stronger partnerships and cooperation among all nations and peoples.

Rest assured that the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations remains committed to bolstering respect for the principal of universal fraternity in our collective quest for justice, dignity and peace.

Let me propose the Alliance’s Decalogue on human fraternity:

1) *respect* for all nations and peoples, regardless of their creed, culture, and civilization;

2) *dialogue* as an essential tool for engaging in a better understanding of different cultures and perspectives;

3) *tolerance* as a basis of respect for every person's human dignity and fundamental rights with full appreciation for the rich diversity of our world's cultures and civilizations;

4) *empathy* as an ethical virtue to build bridges of mutual understanding and cooperation in our quest for universal acceptance and peaceful coexistence;

5) *inclusion* as a process that promotes the full and equal right of individuals and groups to participate in their society regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation and gender identity, or disability status;

6) *diversity* as a positive and enriching concept; a just imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity;

7) *solidarity* as a commitment to help others in difficult situations in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern;

8) *dignity* and equal rights of all members of the human family as interdependent and mutually reinforcing and forming the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world;

9) *multiculturalism* as a process of expressing diversity in an age of globalization and not simply an attitude or view about others;

10) "*convivencia*" or "living together" as a sacred duty and attitude of peaceful coexistence.