

UN inter-cultural initiative helping world get through troubled times – Secretary-General



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon addresses ministerial meeting

26 September 2009 – Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon today underscored the vital role the United Nations initiative to promote inter-cultural understanding plays in building trust and reducing tensions in a world facing multiple crises.

The Alliance of Civilizations “is helping us to get through these troubled times,” he **told** a ministerial meeting held at UN Headquarters.

He said the Alliance, launched in 2005, is building trust among diverse cultures, supporting reconciliation and reducing tensions between communities.

“We in this room have long understood that this effort is central to foreign policy... that it is essential to diplomacy... and that it helps to lay the foundation for lasting peace,” Mr. Ban stated.

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“We know that where there is conflict, we need more than signed peace accords, we need trust... the kind of trust the Alliance is fostering.”

But the Alliance is much more than a tool for helping countries and regions torn apart by conflicts, the Secretary-General noted, adding that it has a growing role to play in soothing tensions caused by economic inequality.

“This is all the more important as the world copes with a global economic crisis,” he said. “The international response is rightly focused on economic measures. It is important to help markets. But we also have to help struggling people. And that includes promoting tolerance.

“The painful truth is that when there are fewer jobs to go around, people often blame minorities. Although no one group caused the current crisis, we are seeing a backlash against many cultural and religious minorities,” Mr. Ban stated, noting that this is particularly true for migrant workers.

Responding to this issue, the Alliance will hold a roundtable in a couple of days on how to better integrate migrants into society. It will also hold a video festival on migration and diversity, which will feature short videos by youth from around the world.

Mr. Ban noted other projects initiated by the Alliance, including a fellowship programme for emerging leaders from the Muslim world and the West and a clearinghouse on education about religions and beliefs.

"Let us continue developing the very concrete initiatives that are giving meaning to the Alliance's lofty aims," he said. "By doing that, we can help improve relations – neighbour to neighbour, community to community and country to country."

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