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Ban stresses need for tolerance and civility amid increasing polarization



Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

13 September 2010 – At a time of threats to burn the Koran and violent responses to that from some Muslims, the United Nations will next week convene a high-level meeting of a major international body that seeks to promote inter-cultural understanding.

“Extremism loves a vacuum,” Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said today, announcing the convening of the Alliance of Civilizations on the margins of next week’s UN summit meeting and opening of the General Assembly’s 65th annual session.

“The Alliance is part of our answer to polarization, stereotyping and hatred,” he told a [news conference](#) of the body launched in 2005 by Spain and Turkey under UN auspices. “The events of recent days drive home yet again the need for countervailing voices – the voices of moderation and mutual respect.”

He said United States Pastor Terry Jones’ threat to burn the Koran was just one small issue, albeit one that cannot be tolerated, but it had created “a huge problem worldwide,” and he cautioned against being “hijacked or dominated by just one single incident...”

“If the world leaders or the international community are sometimes influenced and hijacked by such a small incident, then unfortunately we may be losing our focus,” he added. “Therefore, the media’s role will be crucially important. That’s why from

time to time I'm emphasizing the role of journalists in addressing all the world issues."

Mr. Ban stressed that one high-level meeting of the Alliance may not be sufficient, but said the organization had been gaining support from the international community, with a membership now of more than 120.

"This is a time for all of us to be more tolerant, more appreciative of other traditions and religions and beliefs and faiths," he said. "It is quite unfortunate that we have seen most recently some polarization of extreme views. This is totally not desirable, not acceptable at this time, when the whole world has to march forward to overcome the financial crisis and to overcome many regional conflict issues. All these conflicts come from a lack of mutual understanding."

Citing Alliance projects, he highlighted efforts to educate young people and have immediate media responses whenever some incorrect information has been disseminated.

"All of this is something which we will deepen and widen our discussions," he said. "I'm working very hard with world leaders, and I will pay more attention on this point whenever I have bilateral meetings."

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[Ban urges young people to use their voices to build tolerance, understanding](#)