

## Remarks by Matthew Hodes, Director of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations at World Cultural Forum

Posted on [June 7, 2013](#)



Hangzhou, China, 18 May 2013

It is my great honour to address you here today at the World Cultural Forum. I am particularly honoured to be here on the same agenda as Dr. Yan Zhaozhu, former director of the Cultural Research Department of the Policy Research Office of Central Committee of Communist Party of China. The topic of this important gathering, “enhancing dialogues and cooperation of civilizations, facilitating the world harmony and development” is particularly important to my organization, UNAOC, because it lies at the heart of our mission. I will elaborate further later in my comments.

I want to thank the Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, whose gracious assistance and support helped bring me here today. Your commitment to this critical topic is essential.

China, with a record of 10 percent growth over 30 years—a feat no other country in history has achieved, is a major global power. The world has benefitted from China’s growth and leadership. And by holding a meeting like this, with a topic like this, China’s commitment to leadership on the issue of dialogue among civilizations as a means of addressing environmental issues is clear.

Regarding the issues confronting us today relating to the environment, the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, H.E. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser, President of the 66th General Assembly, has previously offered strong opinions that I want to use to help the stage for my own remarks.

Last year before the World Ecological Safety Assembly, he stated his "strong belief in the close relationship between the Ecological Safety and Sustainable Development, between climate stability and our existence on our planet."

The High Representative told the Assembly "the current world-wide eco-crises and frequent unexpected eco-disasters in various parts of our planet are seriously threatening human survival and development, particularly affecting the most vulnerable countries with high poverty ratio."

It is beyond debate that we, and I mean all the residents of this planet, are facing serious climate and ecological challenges. This is particularly evident in the new phenomenal threats as Hurricanes, Tsunamis, sand storms, food insecurity, land degradation, mud slides, high water surges, volcanic eruptions and other types of environmental challenges, which can be sudden or gradual.

There is global consensus on the urgent need for actions by Member States based their respective capacities to protect our environment, however, different political and economic interests always stand in the way of realizing real implementation or fulfilment of commitments. We have seen that agreements on the environment are difficult to reach, that "no formula fits all". It is because of this record that we must dedicate ourselves to a better understanding of the interdependence that characterizes the global system.

As the High Representative has reminded us, "we all have a duty under the United Nations Charter and other relevant instruments to respond collectively to natural threats. If we do not honour our responsibilities, we all will bear the consequences of our own environmental impunity." As we approach 2015 and the completion of the Millennium Development Goals let us remember that one of those goals was MDG 7 "Ensuring Environmental Sustainability".

We all play a role: governments, international organizations, non-governmental organizations – all working together within our own spheres we can make a difference. Balanced and fair use of the planet must be at the core of our approaches.

This brings me back to the topic for our consideration at this World Cultural Forum, "enhancing dialogues and cooperation of civilizations, facilitating the world harmony and development". The UNAOC is already seeking to do exactly this. We operate in an attempt to embody the principles of the UN Charter, starting with its first three words; "We the Peoples" and we do mean all "Peoples".

The only way we will reach agreements that provide balanced and fair results for all Peoples is through dialogue. We must never fail to take advantage of every opportunity to discuss our differences as that discussion, even when it is difficult, is the only path to resolution.

I like the term "global commons." It reminds us that, in many ways, planet Earth is just a very big village. The oceans whose levels are now rising are the same for everyone. We all sail upon the same waves, our commercial goods travel the same routes. And, yes, we all breathe the same air. Our varied cultures all impact on the ways we do certain things: finding food and shelter, traveling from place to place, forming communities. But we all share the fact that, however differently we approach these basic questions, those questions exist for all of us.

In the end, cultural diversity does not impact on whether we should protect the environment but it impacts how we protect the environment. It does not change the need to achieve the MDGs but it certainly impacts on the approaches we use to achieve them. And so we must talk to one another. And the better the quality of our dialogues, the more likely we will arrive at balanced and fair conclusions that serve all of the "Peoples" of the world – all served by the UN Charter.