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Role of Alliance of Civilizations more vital than ever, say UN officials



ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS

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With its ability to foster cross-cultural understanding among peoples and societies, the Alliance of Civilizations initiative is crucial in the struggle to combat intolerance, extremism and bigotry worldwide, United Nations officials stressed today.

The work of the Alliance touches on many of the threats at the top of the global agenda, [Secretary-General](#) Ban Ki-moon noted in his remarks to the ministerial meeting of the Group of Friends of the Alliance, which was set up in 2005 by Spain and Turkey under UN auspices.

“Two out of every three major conflicts in our world have a cultural dimension. Extremism, religious strife and bigotry fuel the fire,” Mr. Ban said.

“Even the most stable democracies suffer horrific acts of hatred and the killing of innocent civilians singled out for their identity or their beliefs,” he added. “Across the world, bridges of understanding strain under the weight of intolerance and polarization.”

He told the meeting, held at UN Headquarters on the margins of the annual high-level debate of the General Assembly, that promoting dialogue and understanding has long been considered a form of ‘soft power’ because it brings about change slowly, without military action.

“But the events of this year taught us that when people unite in common cause, they can change the world more quickly than anyone could imagine... and more forcefully than any amount of military might,” said Mr. Ban.

“The youth in Egypt, Tunisia and elsewhere demonstrated how firing off an email can be more powerful than firing a gun. They proved that even with no position in government, no weapons and barely any resources, they could shape the future and the present.”

The Alliance has a mandate to marshal this power for good, he said, adding that it can also contribute to preventive diplomacy efforts. “The Alliance of Civilizations can help to empower a great cadre of civilian negotiators, diplomats and ambassadors who can fortify the bedrock values that sustain and promote peace,” said the Secretary-General.

General Assembly President Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser noted that recent acts of terrorism around the world, including the attacks in Norway in July, have underscored the urgency of the Alliance’s mission.

“We must focus our efforts to bridge differences and overcome the intolerance and divisions which potentially threaten world peace,” he told the meeting.

Mr. Al-Nasser pointed out that the Alliance has mounted a range of innovative projects since its establishment to improve understanding between peoples across different cultures, and to counter the forces that fuel divisions, incitement to hatred, and extremism.

“The events around us are challenging,” said the President, adding that events such as those in the Arab world recently underscore the urgent need for governments and communities to commit to building a culture of peace and sustainable development.

The Alliance will hold its fourth forum in December in the Qatari capital of Doha.

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