



## Q&A With Peter Gorgievski on Citizen Diplomacy

*Interviewed by Ghazi Ahamat*

Peter is the co-founder of the [Global Dialogue Foundation](#) (GDF). His greatest passion and focus is to create a culture of peace throughout the world.

As GDF's Chief Executive Officer, Peter has led the development of '[Unity in Diversity](#)' forums and events in Australia and India which were held under the auspices of the [United Nations Alliance of Civilizations](#). GDF has played a valuable role in citizen diplomacy and further strengthening relations between Australia and India.



For 20 years prior, Peter was involved in the international freight and shipping business. He was the Managing Director of DGX Asia Pacific. Peter has also held senior positions with Direct Container Line in Australia, Hong Kong and Singapore.

***Could you briefly tell us a little about what the Global Dialogue Foundation is, and what you do?***

Global Dialogue Foundation is a not-for-profit organisation and a pioneer in the field of citizen diplomacy to promote intercultural understanding. Working under the auspices of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, we are developing a number of practical solutions that promote collaboration and understanding among cultures and communities.

Our inaugural Unity in Diversity Forum [10.10.10](#), which was held in October 2010, was the very first UN Alliance of Civilizations affiliated event in Australia. It engaged organisations aiming to promote intercultural understanding from several countries in the Asia Pacific region. The event illustrated how cultural diversity plays out differently in different regions of the world. Furthermore, it confirmed the relevant role of the UN Alliance of Civilizations in raising the issue of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue from a global perspective, encouraging policy-makers around the world to address it and facilitate the connection between government policy and innovative practices at a grassroots level.

Following the success in Melbourne, GDF organised a Unity in Diversity Forum under the auspices of the UN Alliance of Civilizations in Thiruvananthapuram, India. Several South Asian countries were engaged, among them students and youth from all around the world. The topics were similar to those discussed in Melbourne.

Both Forums highlighted the need for communities experiencing the ground-level realities, to be part of the global intercultural agenda. Since then, GDF has organised a Unity in Diversity Lecture in Mumbai on "Doing business in a multicultural environment", and a very recent event in Melbourne on "Strengthening the role of communities, business and non-governmental organisations in cross-cultural understanding", at which the UN High Representative for the

Alliance, H.E. Dr. Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, addressed over 130 different cultures, communities and organisations.

***The upcoming event between GDF and ACCESS is on 'Citizen Diplomacy'. What does citizen diplomacy mean to you?***

To me, citizen diplomacy means 'regular' citizens from communities, non-governmental organisations, clubs, and all members of civil society, working in an organised manner to represent their cause or country. This could include the exchange of ideas, best practices and collaborating towards common goals. Citizen diplomacy also creates first-hand opportunities for communities to stimulate coordinated action towards creating inclusive (multicultural) societies, to strengthen their collaboration with Local, State and Federal Governments and to find increasing levels of support. It also aims to build strong civil society chapters that contribute to the mission of the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

***The way we look at International Relations has traditionally focused on State actors and governments - hence 'International' relations. What do you think citizen diplomacy can accomplish that governments can't?***

I think citizen diplomacy stimulates progress, especially when it is aimed at supporting official diplomacy. It is an interesting question. I'd prefer to think in terms of the complementary benefits of citizen diplomacy to official diplomacy and what is possible in building a better world in alignment. Though, I think citizen diplomacy enables citizens, as the representatives of each culture, to properly understand and express the needs of their communities. I don't think official diplomacy can do this effectively on its own. Better yet, I think that citizen diplomacy can help resolve issues in communities in a friendly and timely manner, or before they escalate into conflicts, violence or terror.

***The GDF recently hosted an event to launch the Australian Civil Society Chapter of the UN Alliance of Civilizations. What is the UNAOC, and what will this Civil Society Chapter do?***

The United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) is an initiative of the UN Secretary-General which aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions. It also helps to counter the forces that fuel polarisation and extremism. The UNAOC was established in 2005, at the initiative of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations and under the leadership of H.E. Dr. Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as High Representative for the UNAOC.

The civil society chapter is an initiative organised by GDF Unity in Diversity that connects Australian non-governmental organisations active in the field of intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity to the mission, programs and partners of the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

The main objectives of the civil society chapter are: to facilitate the exchange of information and best practices; to build synergy between Australian organisations, the UNAOC and its partners; to raise the profile and the visibility of the innovative policies and practices of Australian actors on the global scene; to create opportunities for local Australian organisations to attend events organised by the UNAOC and its partners; and to participate in programs such as the annual Forum, regional and thematic programs, grants and competitions, and training programs.

As a pilot in Australia and India, the Civil Society Chapter is earmarked for world-wide implementation. It is very unique in that it proposes to form the nucleus of a civil society through which all cultures and civilisations can express their own voice at local and global levels - in the UN system, through the UNAOC.

***Why the name 'Alliance of Civilizations'?***

As I understand it, the name 'Alliance of Civilizations' counters the claim [[made by historian Samuel Huntington](#)] that the post-Cold War world will be characterised by a 'Clash of Civilizations'. Following the [Dialogue Among Civilizations](#), the Alliance of Civilizations has meant that not everyone will easily use the motto, 'Clash of Civilizations'. As civilisations are a collective of cultures, ethnicities, faiths, peoples, nationalities, etc., the Alliance incorporates all of these components. This why it is so important to nurture it and why GDF's collaboration with the UNAOC is at the highest of levels.

***What do you think it takes for genuine understanding to happen across cultures?***

This is a difficult question. At the very least, I think it requires working together through dialogue, to maintain the identity of original traditions of each culture and civilisation. This includes safe-keeping each and every individual heritage, traditional way of living, ethnic identity, characteristic, language, eating habit, etc. Also, to foster the impact of each culture on the development of mainstream society, not only for the benefit of humankind in terms of developing respect and appreciation for each other, but to develop a culture of peace throughout the world.

[\*ACCESS is hosting a joint event with GDF on 'Citizen Diplomacy' on Tuesday 8 November.\*](#)

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