

## Unity in Diversity Forum in Kerala: A New Development of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in India

27<sup>th</sup> January, 2011

The Global Dialogue Foundation together with co-organizing partners, SAGE, PeaceWorks and PNCA, will present the 'Unity in Diversity' – Bridging Cultures: Building Peace and Development Forum, in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on Feb 6 -8, 2011, held under the auspices of the UNAOC.

The Forum is designed to open-up new pathways for improved understanding and collaboration among people cultures and communities, by offering an innovative platform for governmental, civil society organization and community leaders to discuss and begin breaking the wall of intolerance.

Honorable Chief Minister of the Government of Kerala, Sri. V.S. Achuthanandan, will inaugurate the Forum. Issues that will be discussed at the Forum range from the *Role of religion and beliefs in promoting peace and development* to *How can bridging cultures to build peace, encourage and support development*. These roundtable discussions will lead to an action plan of concrete and practical steps that can be taken, to bridge the cultural gap.

The forum will also listen to the voice of the youth and engage the leaders of tomorrow. Youth Ambassadors will be chosen from the popular Youth Essay Competition, will present their essays and share their thoughts on shaping perceptions and challenging stereotypes. The Unity in Diversity Youth Ambassadors will join a network of previous competitions winners, empowered to take concrete steps to promote cultural harmony.

Senior leadership of GDF share their thoughts and comment on the Unity in Diversity Forum in Kerala, India:

**KK Sarachandra Bose - Hon. Chairman of Global Dialogue Foundation**



### **What are the objectives and expectations of the Forum?**

“..the key objectives and expected outcomes of the forum are fundamentally to improve the understanding and cooperation among people and cultures by rethinking the way we deal with cultural tension. To achieve this goal, the Forum in Kerala should develop concrete and practical initiatives that promote dialogue, trust, understanding, cooperation, progress and development.”

“The Forum is a unique opportunity to learn from the experiences of community leaders who are working successfully at the grassroots level to bring people of diverse cultures together, fostering dialogue understanding and cooperation”

**Maya Shahani** - *Hon. Vice Chairperson of Global Dialogue Foundation*

**Why such a Forum in India and Kerala in particular?**

“Kerala was chosen to host this event, as it is the most religiously diverse state in India. Religious diversity has been a defining trait of India’s population – India has the largest Hindu population, together with the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest Muslim population. Kerala is the perfect microcosm with 56% of the population Hindus, 24% Muslims and 19% Christians.”



**Peter (Pece) Gorgievski** – *Co-founder and CEO of Global Dialogue Foundation*

**What is the overall mission of Global Dialogue Foundation and what are its next projects?**

“Our aim is to bring UN Alliance of Civilizations together with local civil society organizations”

“GDF mandate is multi-faceted; in respect to this Forum, the primary drivers are to promote worldwide experiences of multiculturalism and integration. We together with AOC understand the importance of combating intolerance at the grass-roots levels.”

“GDF is committed to working with partners to establish annual dialogue Forums throughout the Asia Pacific region and also globally; to create a movement that raises awareness for cultural diversity, dialogue at all levels and cooperation for the common good.”

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, and to help counter the forces that fuel polarization and extremism. The Alliance was established in 2005, at the initiative of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations and under the leadership of Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as High Representative for the Alliance.