

23 September 2011

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser,
President of the 66th Session of the General Assembly,
at the Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of the UN Alliance
of Civilizations**

His Excellency Mr. Jorge Sampaio,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express my gratitude to His Excellency Mr. Jorge Sampaio, United Nations High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations, for inviting me to open today's Ministerial Meeting of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations.

I would like to commend Turkey and Spain, the co-sponsors of the Alliance; Brazil, which hosted the 2010 Annual Alliance Forum; and Qatar, the Host of the December 2011 Forum.

Recent acts of terrorism around the world, including the horrifying 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.

Indeed, the Alliance of Civilizations, through its activities in promoting respect for diversity and pluralism - regardless of religion, race or ethnicity - is a coherent expression of the founding principles of the United Nations itself. The General Assembly, in its Resolution 64/14, welcomed the Alliance and expressed support for its work.

The Alliance provides great support to the various observances proclaimed by the General Assembly, aimed at promoting intercultural understanding and a culture of peace.

In its short life, the Alliance has also mounted a range of innovative projects to improve understanding between peoples across different cultures, and to counter the forces that fuel divisions, incitement to hatred, and extremism. Some of you have adopted the approach of the Alliance in your own national plans to promote peace, intercultural understanding, and dialogue. You have done this through projects in education, media, migration and youth, among others. Through partnerships with state and non-state actors, the Alliance is able to facilitate even more projects at the local, national and international levels. I am certain that you are as impressed as I am with the many projects detailed in the Annual Report of the High Representative.

The Fourth Forum of the Alliance, to be held in Doha in December this year, will be a milestone for the Alliance. In Doha, the linkage between the Alliance's agenda and MDGs will be explored by drawing

attention to the connection between cultural diversity and development. Within the mandate of the General Assembly, I am willing to support the outcome of the Doha Forum.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The events around us are challenging. Consider for example the awakening in the Arab world. These events, while being founded in the quest for freedom and dignity, underscore the urgent need for governments and communities to commit to building a culture of peace and sustainable development.

Acts of intolerance, extremism, and xenophobia in the last few months have occupied the headlines. We must pay equal attention to efforts to counter these acts in accordance with international law. It is also important to reaffirm that extremism and hatred can not be associated with any particular religion or belief or culture. I am confident that under the able and wise leadership of President Jorge Sampaio, the Alliance will find creative ways to rise to the challenge of these historic times. In the short and long-term, the activities of the Alliance are vital assets for us to invest in, encourage and support.

I wish you great success in your important endeavors.