

Alliance of Civilizations

UN Report of the High-level Group

By [Global Research](#)

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Theme: [Religion](#), [United Nations](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

To advance the Alliance of Civilizations, the UN Secretary-General established a High-level Group of eminent personalities and tasked this Group with generating a report containing an analysis of the rise in cross-cultural polarization and extremism and a set of practical recommendations to counter this phenomenon. The High-level Group met five times from November 2005 to November 2006, at the conclusion of which it produced a report which takes a multi-polar approach within which it prioritizes relations between Muslim and Western societies.

The report is structured in two parts: Part I presents an analysis of the global context and of the state of relations between Muslim and Western societies. It concludes with a set of policy recommendations, indicating the High-level Group's belief that certain political steps are pre-requisites to any substantial and lasting improvement in relations between Muslim and Western societies. Part II of the report reflects the High-level Group's view that tensions across cultures have spread beyond the political level into the hearts and minds of populations. To counter this trend, the Group analyzes and presents recommendations in each of four thematic areas: Education, Youth, Migration, and Media. The Report concludes with the High-level Group's suggestions for the implementation of its recommendations.

The Report of the High-level Group was presented to UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan and to Prime Ministers José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero and Recep Tayyip Erdogan on 13 November 2006 at the final meeting of the High-level Group in Istanbul, Turkey.

To download the complete report: <http://www.unaoc.org/repository/report.htm>

For highlights see Excerpts below as well as Press Review

Press Report 13 November 2006

No clash of civilizations, says UN report

A UN-sponsored group says the Israel-Palestinian conflict is the main cause of global tensions.

By Dan Murphy | Staff writer of The Christian Science Monitor

CAIRO

A UN-sponsored group called the Alliance of Civilizations, created last year to find ways to bridge the growing divide between Muslim and Western societies, released a first report

Monday that says the conflict over Israel and the Palestinian territories is the central driver in global tensions.

“Our emphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not meant to imply that it is the overt cause of all tensions between Muslim and Western societies,” write the report’s authors, a group of academics and present and former government officials from 19 different countries. “Nevertheless, it is our view that the Israeli-Palestinian issue has taken on a symbolic value that colors cross cultural and political relations ... well beyond its limited geographic scope.”

But while the authors hope their report will invigorate and create cross-cultural dialogue, its tone implies that it is unlikely to be well received by the United States and Israel, focusing as it does on allegations of double standards by those two nations while giving less time to the faults of the Palestinians or specific Muslim governments.

Criticism of US policies, though at times oblique, is a major feature of the document and hits on themes that have angered representatives of the Bush administration in the past. For instance, in a discussion of Al Qaeda’s attack on the US on Sept. 11, the report states: “Later, these attacks were presented as one of the justifications for the invasion of Iraq, whose link with them has never been demonstrated, feeding a perception among Muslim societies of unjust aggression stemming from the West.”

While that is indeed a common view in Muslim countries, it is unlikely to gain the favor of the current US administration, whose representative to the United Nations, John Bolton, is an ardent supporter of the invasion of Iraq and a frequent critic of the world body. Earlier this year, Mr. Bolton characterized the UN Human Rights Commission as packed with officials from “some of the world’s most notorious human rights abusers.”

The report is the result of a UN-sanctioned “High Level Group” meeting of some twenty “eminent personalities” that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appointed last year. The group, which was cosponsored by the Prime Ministers of Turkey and Spain and included among its authors Nobel Peace Prize-winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu and former Iranian president Mohammed Khatami, issued the final report on Nov. 13 at its final meeting in Istanbul.

To be sure, the report is also framed as a direct challenge to the notion that a “Clash of Civilizations” is imminent – a concept first popularized by Samuel Huntington’s 1996 book of the same name.

In a statement, Mr. Kofi Annan said it was clear that religion is not at the root of current tensions.

“The problem is not the Koran or the Torah or the Bible,” Mr. Annan said. “The problem is never the faith, it is the faithful and how they behave towards each other.”

That sentiment was echoed in an editorial published in the Houston Chronicle on Sunday by three of the report’s authors, who also said that political repression in the Muslim world contributes to extremism.

“Denying peaceful opposition movements the freedom to express their views and jailing their supporters generate anger and resentment, encouraging some to join violent groups,” wrote Mr. Tutu, former Indonesian foreign minister Ali Alatas, and Andri Azoulay, an advisor

to Morocco's King Mohammed VI.

"When Western governments lend their support – tacitly or overtly – to authoritarian regimes, they become part of the problem," the authors wrote.

The overall objective of the paper is to set out problems between the Muslim and the West as a matter of politics, and not of culture, and tends to see anger and misunderstanding as largely a problem of inadequate education.

For instance, the authors point to a recent Gallup poll that found 57 percent of Americans either responded "nothing" or "I don't know" when asked what they most admired about Muslim societies, as evidence for a need for education systems in both the West and Muslim countries to provide a "basic understanding of religious traditions other than their own."

The authors also point to another recent survey that found 30 percent of US government money for cultural exchanges go to programs with Europe – the societies with which the US has the most in common – while just 6 percent go to programs with the Middle East, arguably the place where such efforts could do the most good.

How to build an alliance of civilizations

The UN's High Level Group report includes a set of concrete recommendations for the international community. Among the recommendations:

- The international community should draft a white paper to analyze the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- An international conference should be convened to reinvigorate the Middle East peace process.
- Ruling parties in the Muslim world should provide space for the participation of peaceful political groups.
- Leaders and shapers of public opinion should behave responsibly and work to promote understanding among cultures.
- The UN should appoint a high representative to assist in defusing cross-cultural tensions.
- The UN should establish a forum for the alliance of civilizations under its auspices.
- Journalists should receive improved training in intercultural understanding.
- Media content should aim to promote intercultural dialogue.
- Educational materials and media literacy programs in schools should face a critical review.
- Governments should increase the number of international youth exchanges and youth-oriented websites.
- The international community should create media campaigns to combat discrimination.

Source: United Nations Fourth High Level Group, www.unaoc.org

(Embargoed until 0830 GMT 1030 Istanbul Monday 13 November)

PRESS RELEASE

Politics, not religion, at the heart of growing Muslim-West divide, new report argues

(ISTANBUL, TURKEY 13 November) The key reasons for the growing divide between Muslim and Western societies are not religious, but political, concludes a report presented to Secretary-General Kofi Annan today in Istanbul.

On receiving the report, the Secretary-General said: "We need to get away from stereotypes, generalizations and preconceptions, and take care not to let crimes committed by individuals or small groups dictate our image of an entire people, an entire region, or an entire religion.

"We should start by reaffirming – and demonstrating – that the problem is not the Koran, nor the Torah or the Bible. Indeed, I have often said the problem is never the faith – it is the faithful, and how they behave towards each other."

In its report, the High-level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations maintains that although religion is often cynically exploited to stir passions, fuel suspicions and support alarmist claims that the world is facing a new "war of religion", the root of the matter is political.

Furthermore, the Arab-Israeli conflict has become a critical symbol of the deepening rift.

Along with Western military interventions in countries like Iraq and Afghanistan the Group argues, this conflict contributes significantly to the growing sense of resentment and mistrust that mars relations among communities. The report also suggests that the repression of nonviolent political opposition and the slow pace of reforms in some Muslim countries is a key factor in the rise of extremism.

The Co-chairs of the Group presented the report to the Secretary-General as well as to the Prime Ministers of Spain and Turkey, as co-sponsoring governments of the Alliance initiative.

In his address, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, said: "At a time when the increasing polarization between major cultures and belief systems throughout the world urgently needs to be addressed, the presentation of this Report and its recommendations to the international community constitutes a hopeful and exciting step in efforts to sow the seeds of respect and understanding."

The High-level Group – a panel of 20 world renowned experts (*see full list below*) – was appointed by Secretary-General Annan a year ago to explore ways of addressing the increasing polarization between Muslim and Western societies.

Speaking at the event, the Spanish Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, said: "We cannot stand idle in the face of claims that a clash of cultures and civilizations is inevitable. In our efforts to counter them ... we can count on international law, on the UN, on human

rights, and, above all, we can count on the equal dignity of all men and women and on our unique capacity for dialogue and conflict resolution. From now on, we will also count on the Alliance of Civilizations.”

In order to address the issues outlined in their report, members of the High-level Group offer a number of practical solutions, including:

- A High Representative to assist the Secretary-General in defusing crises that arise at the intersection of religion and politics and to oversee the implementation of the Report’s recommendations.
- A White Paper analyzing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dispassionately and objectively, giving voice to the competing narratives on both sides, reviewing and diagnosing the successes and failures of past peace initiatives, and establishing clearly the conditions that must be met to find a way out of this crisis. In addition, the High-level Group called for the resumption of the political process, including the convening of an international conference on the Middle East Peace Process as soon as possible.
- A regional Middle East conference to be convened as soon as possible and involving all the relevant actors with aim of reinvigorating the peace process.
- Support for the expansion of political pluralism in Muslim countries. The High-level Group calls on ruling parties in the Muslim world to provide the space for the full participation of non-violent political parties, whether religious or secular in nature and calls on foreign governments to be consistent in their support for pluralism by, for example, respecting the outcome of elections.

The Report puts forward a range of concrete proposals in the areas of education, media, youth and migration to build bridges and promote a culture of respect and understanding among Western and Muslim communities, including:

- The development of film and television programs co-produced across religious and cultural boundaries and showing diversity as a normal feature of society.
- The establishment of a “Risk Fund” to offset the market forces that encourage mostly sensationalistic and stereotypical cultural representations.
- The creation of a Global Youth Solidarity Fund, to encourage young people to contribute to the implementation of all of the recommendations set forth in this report.
- The promotion of cross-cultural and human rights education to ensure that students everywhere develop an understanding of other cultures and religions.

Further recommendations are included in the attached “Highlights of the Report”.

The report comes at the end of a year-long process in which the Group had three main meetings – in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, Doha, Qatar and Dakar, Senegal – as well as a working session in New York. Their work was supported by extensive analysis and research conducted and commissioned by the Alliance of Civilizations Secretariat in New York as well

as through consultations with a wide range of multilateral agencies and international organizations. For more information about the Alliance of Civilizations, to download a copy of the report and to see interviews with High-level Group members, please visit: www.unaoc.org.

Individual members of the group are available in Istanbul for interviews through Carlos Jimenez Renjifo (Tel: +32-475-782 802; jimenez@unric.org) or Emmanuel Kattan (Tel: +90 537 575 1355; kattan@un.org).

For interviews following the launch, you may also contact Renata Sivacolundhu at UNHQ in New

York (Tel: +1 212 963 2932; sivacolundhu@un.org).

High-level Group Members

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THE REPORT

Selected excerpts

1.1 Our world is alarmingly out of balance. For many, the last century brought unprecedented progress, prosperity, and freedom. For others, it marked an era of subjugation, humiliation and dispossession. Ours is a world of great inequalities and paradoxes: a world where the income of the planet's three richest people is greater than the combined income of the world's least developed countries; where modern medicine performs daily miracles and yet 3 million people die every year of preventable diseases; where we know more about distant universes than ever before, yet 130 million children have no access to education; where despite the existence of multilateral covenants and institutions, the international community often seems helpless in the face of conflict and genocide. For most of humanity, freedom from want and freedom from fear appear as elusive as ever.

1.2 We also live in an increasingly complex world, where polarized perceptions, fueled by injustice and inequality, often lead to violence and conflict, threatening international stability. Over the past few years, wars, occupation and acts of terror have exacerbated mutual suspicion and fear within and among societies. Some political leaders and sectors of the media, as well as radical groups have exploited this environment, painting mirror images of a world made up of mutually exclusive cultures, religions, or civilizations, historically distinct and destined for confrontation.

1.3 The anxiety and confusion caused by the “clash of civilizations” theory regrettably has distorted the terms of the discourse on the real nature of the predicament the world is facing. The history of relations between cultures is not only one of wars and confrontation. It is also based on centuries of constructive exchanges, cross-fertilization, and peaceful co-existence. Moreover, classifying internally fluid and diverse societies along hard-and-fast lines of civilizations interferes with more illuminating ways of understanding questions of identity, motivation and behavior. Rifts between the powerful and the powerless or the rich and the poor or between different political groups, classes, occupations and nationalities have greater explanatory power than such cultural categories. Indeed, the latter stereotypes only serve to entrench already polarized opinions. Worse, by promoting the misguided view that cultures are set on an unavoidable collision course, they help turn negotiable disputes into seemingly intractable identity-based conflicts that take hold of the popular imagination. It is essential, therefore, to counter the stereotypes and misconceptions that entrench patterns of hostility and mistrust among societies.

1.4 In this context, the need to build bridges between societies, to promote dialogue and understanding and to forge the collective political will to address the world’s imbalances has never been greater. This urgent task constitutes the *raison d’être* of the Alliance of Civilizations.

...

2.1 An Alliance of Civilizations must by nature be based on a multi-polar perspective. As such, the High-level Group has been guided in its deliberations by principles which set out the framework for promoting a culture of dialogue and respect among all nations and cultures. The Charter of the United Nations, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which seeks to free humanity of fear and misery, as well as the other fundamental documents on cultural and religious rights² are the basic reference for these principles as listed below.

2.2 An increasingly interdependent and globalized world can be regulated only through the rule of law and an effective multilateral system, with the United Nations system at its core. This requires adherence to international law and covenants including all rights and responsibilities governing the conduct of war as articulated in International Humanitarian Law (particularly the Geneva Conventions), respect for the institutions that establish them, and support for mechanisms that adjudicate violations of these norms.

2.3 A full and consistent adherence to human rights standards forms the foundation for stable societies and peaceful international relations. These rights include the prohibition against physical and mental torture; the right to freedom of religion; and the right to freedom of expression and association. The integrity of these rights rests on their universal and unconditional nature. These rights should therefore be considered inviolable and all States, international organizations, non-state actors, and individuals, under all

circumstances, must abide by them.

2.4 Diversity of civilizations and cultures is a basic feature of human society and a driving force of human progress. Civilizations and cultures reflect the great wealth and heritage of humankind; their nature is to overlap, interact and evolve in relationship to one another. There is no hierarchy among cultures, as each has contributed to the evolution of humanity. The history of civilizations is in fact a history of mutual borrowing and constant cross-fertilization.

2.5 Poverty leads to despair, a sense of injustice, and alienation that, when combined with political grievances, can foster extremism. Eradication of poverty would diminish those factors linked to economic marginalisation and alienation and must therefore be aggressively pursued, as called for in the Millennium Development Goals.

...

4.1 Building on the efforts of the Dialogue Among Civilizations³ and other related initiatives⁴, the Alliance of Civilizations must examine - within a multi-polar and comprehensive approach - the state of relations between diverse contemporary societies, their world-views and the reciprocal perceptions that shape these relations. The analysis here focuses on relations between Western and Muslim societies though the approach taken by the High-level Group to this issue may serve as a reference for the bridging of other divides in the interest of establishing peace and harmony.

4.2 Notwithstanding historical periods of tension and confrontation between adherents of the three major monotheistic religions - conflicts which themselves were often more political than religious in nature - it is important to note that peaceful co-existence, beneficial trade and reciprocal learning have been hallmarks of relations between Christianity, Islam and Judaism from their earliest period until today. During medieval times, Islamic civilization was a major source of innovation, knowledge acquisition, and scientific advancement that contributed to the emergence of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment in Europe. Historically, under Muslim rule, Jews and Christians were largely free to practice their faiths. Many rose to high political positions and Jews in particular took refuge in Muslim empires at different times in history to escape discrimination and persecution. Similarly, in recent centuries, political, scientific, cultural, and technological developments in the West have influenced many aspects of life in Muslim societies and many Muslims have sought to immigrate to Western nations in part for the political freedoms and economic opportunities found there.

Relations Between Societies of Western and Muslim Countries

4.3 Selective accounts of ancient history are used by radical movements to paint an ominous portrait of historically distinct and mutually exclusive faith communities destined for confrontation. Such distorted historical narratives must be countered. More important for the purposes of this report is the fact that this history does not offer explanations for current conflicts or for the rise in hostility between Western and Muslim societies. On the contrary, the roots of these phenomena lie in developments that took place in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, beginning with European imperialism, the resulting emergence of anti-colonial movements, and the legacy of the confrontations between them.

4.4 The partition of Palestine by the United Nations in 1947, envisaging the establishment of two states - Palestine and Israel - with a special status for Jerusalem, led to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, beginning a chain of events that continues to be one of the most tortuous in relations between Western and Muslim societies. Israel's continuing occupation of Palestinian and other Arab territories and the unresolved status of Jerusalem - a holy city for Muslims and Christians as well as Jews - have persisted with the perceived acquiescence of Western governments and thus are primary causes of resentment and anger in the Muslim world toward Western nations. This occupation has been perceived in the Muslim world as a form of colonialism and has led many to believe, rightly or wrongly, that Israel is in collusion with "the West". These resentments and perceptions were further exacerbated by Israel's disproportionate retaliatory actions in Gaza and Lebanon.

4.5 In another critical context, the Middle East emerged as a vital source of energy crucial for prosperity and power. Cold War powers vied for influence in the strategic and resource rich countries of the region, often in the form of military and political interventions that contributed to stunting those countries' development and eventually backfired on the powerful countries with repercussions that continue to be felt today. One of these events was the 1953 coup in Iran, the aftermath of which demonstrated both the limitations and the dangers of foreign interference in a country's political development.

The Middle East

5.1 With regard to relations between Muslim and Western societies, we must acknowledge the contemporary realities that shape the views of millions of Muslims: the prolonged Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the violence in Afghanistan, and the increasingly violent conflict in Iraq.

5.2 We must stress the increasing urgency of the Palestinian issue, which is a major factor in the widening rift between Muslim and Western societies. In this regard, it is our duty to express our collective opinion that without a just, dignified, and democratic solution based on the will of all peoples involved in this conflict, all efforts - including recommendations contained in this report - to bridge this gap and counter the hostilities among societies are likely to meet with only limited success.

5.3 Our emphasis on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is not meant to imply that it is the overt cause of all tensions between Muslim and Western societies. Other factors also create resentment and mistrust, including the spiraling crisis in Iraq, the continued instability in Afghanistan, issues internal to Muslim societies, as well as terrorist attacks on civilian populations in many countries. Nevertheless, it is our view that the Israeli-Palestinian issue has taken on a symbolic value that colors cross-cultural and political relations among adherents of all three major monotheistic faiths well beyond its limited geographic scope.

5.4 Achieving a just and sustainable solution to this conflict requires courage and a bold vision of the future on the part of Israelis, Palestinians and all countries capable of influencing the situation. We firmly believe that progress on this front rests on the recognition of both the Palestinian and Jewish national aspirations and on the establishment of two fully sovereign and independent states living side by side in peace and security.

5.5 Reaching this objective will require Israel not only to accept but to facilitate the

establishment of a viable Palestinian state. The peace accords involving Israel, Egypt and Jordan demonstrate that such constructive steps taken in line with international law are workable. Moreover, the terms of reference agreed to by all parties at the Madrid Conference in 1991, the peace initiative by President Clinton in 2000, and the peace proposal by the Arab League in its meeting in Beirut, Lebanon in 2002, make it clear that the framework for a broad-based accord does exist and the political will can be generated.

5.6 Of primary importance in this regard is the mutual recognition of the competing narratives that emerged following the establishment of the state of Israel. In the eyes of most Jews and Israelis this event was the result of a long-standing aspiration to build a

Jewish homeland and was immediately followed by an attack from neighboring Arab countries. For Palestinians and a majority of people in the Muslim world, however, the establishment of Israel was experienced as an act of aggression that led to the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and to the occupation of their lands. It is worth noting that these competing narratives are mirrored in divergent interpretations of recent history: different ways of describing conflicts, occupation, and peace negotiation efforts.

5.7 A White Paper on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The competing narratives of Palestinians and Israelis cannot be fully reconciled, but they must be mutually acknowledged in order to establish the foundations of a durable settlement. To this end, we recommend the development of a White Paper analyzing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict dispassionately and objectively, giving voice to the competing narratives on both sides, reviewing and diagnosing the successes and failures of past peace initiatives, and establishing clearly the conditions that must be met to find a way out of this crisis. Such a document could provide a firm foundation for the work of key decision-makers involved in efforts to resolve this conflict. A level-headed and rational analysis would make it clear to the Palestinian people that the price of decades of occupation, misunderstanding and stigmatization is being fully acknowledged, while at the same time contributing to exorcise the fears of Israelis. This effort would strengthen the hand of those who seek a just solution to this conflict while weakening extremists on all sides, as they would no longer be the champions of a cause they have been able to appropriate because its story had been left untold or deliberately ignored by the community of nations.

5.8 A re-invigorated multilateral peace process. As a further step in a renewed effort to solve the problems that lie at the heart of the Middle East crisis, the High-level Group calls for the resumption of the political process, including the convening, as soon as possible, of an international conference on the Middle East Peace Process, to be attended by all relevant actors, with the aim of reaching a comprehensive peace agreement.

5.9 International compacts with Iraq and Afghanistan.⁵ The international community should respond with a sense of responsibility to the political and humanitarian crisis in Iraq. The High-level Group expresses its full support for the efforts of the Arab League to build domestic political consensus in Iraq and for the full implementation of the International Compact with Iraq. Similarly, though in a different regional context, the High-level Group expresses its full support for the recently initiated International Compact with Afghanistan.

5.10 Political pluralism in Muslim countries. One of the contributing factors to the polarization between Muslim and Western societies and to the rise in extremism in these relations is the repression of political movements in the Muslim world. Therefore, it is in the interest of Muslim and Western societies alike that ruling parties in the Muslim world

Other General Policy Recommendations

5.11 A renewed commitment to multilateralism. As noted throughout this report, many of the problems facing the international community can only be addressed effectively within a multilateral framework. It is therefore incumbent upon States to reinforce multilateral institutions – particularly the United Nations – and to support efforts at reform that will strengthen the capacity and performance of these institutions.

5.12 A full and consistent respect for international law and human rights. Polarization between communities grows when universal human rights are defended – or perceived to be defended – selectively. Therefore, establishing genuine dialogue among nations requires a common understanding of international human rights principles and a universal commitment to their full and consistent application. In particular, this dialogue must be founded on respect for human rights (including freedom of conscience, freedom of expression and protection from torture and other inhuman or degrading treatment), as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Geneva Conventions, and other basic documents, as well as on a recognition of the authority of international criminal courts.

5.13 Coordinated migration policies consistent with human rights standards. Migration is most effectively managed when policies are coordinated between countries of origin, transit and destination for migrants and when they are consistent with international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international agreements which guide the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons.

5.14 Combating poverty and economic inequities. An Alliance of Civilizations can only be fully realized within an international framework that includes the commitment of all countries to work toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals. The urgency of this matter can hardly be overstated. Global inequalities are growing at a staggering rate. In Africa, half the population lives under a dollar a day. Although the continent accounts for nearly a sixth of world population, it represents less than 3% of global trade and lags behind in other areas, including investment, education and health⁶. These problems must be tackled urgently, as the increasing gap between rich and poor plays an important role in fueling resentment and eroding global solidarity.

5.15 Protection of the freedom to worship. Freedom of religion and freedom of worship are fundamental rights to be guaranteed by all countries and faith communities. Therefore, particular attention must be paid to the respect for religious monuments and holy sites, as they have a significance that goes to the core of individual and collective religious identity. The violation and desecration of places of worship can grievously damage relations between communities and raise the risk of triggering widespread violence. In line with the resolution adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2001⁷, therefore, we believe that governments should take a strong stand against the desecration of holy sites and places of worship and take responsibility for their protection. We also call upon civil society and international organizations to help promote a culture of tolerance and respect for all religions and religious sites.

5.16 Exercising responsible leadership. Many of the issues feeding tensions between communities arise at the crossroads of politics and religion. One of these issues is the impact of inflammatory language sometimes used by political and religious leaders and the destructive effect such language can have when disseminated by the media. Such language

fuels the spread of hatred and mistrust resulting in Islamophobia, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. In the current climate of fear and suspicion that grips communities throughout the world, leaders and shapers of public opinion have a special responsibility to promote understanding among cultures and mutual respect of religious belief and traditions. Given the influence and the respect they command, it is their duty to avoid violent or provocative language about other people's beliefs or sacred symbols.

5.17 The central importance of civil society activism. While political steps are necessary in order to advance each of the policy recommendations noted above, political action taken without the support of civil society often falls short of affecting lasting change. The High-level Group therefore calls for a greater role and involvement of civil society in the mechanisms for the advancement of its recommendations and, in particular, for the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

5.18 Establishing partnerships to advance an Alliance of Civilizations. The High-level Group recommends the development of partnerships in the framework of the Alliance of Civilizations with international organizations that share its goals, and the reinforcement of their interaction and coordination with the UN system. Special attention should be given to those international organisations that are part of the UN family and those organizations that have already been cooperating with the High-level Group of the Alliance of Civilizations, namely: the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation (UNESCO), the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the League of Arab States, the Islamic Scientific Educational and Cultural Organization (ISESCO), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), and the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), as well as other international and national organizations, public or private.

5.19 The primary purpose of the analysis in Part I of this report – both at the global level and at the level specific to relations between Muslim and Western societies – is to lay the basis and assert the moral grounds for concerted action at institutional and civil society levels to foster cross-cultural harmony and to enhance global stability. The remainder of this report (Part II – Main Fields of Action) explores the primary means by which such action could be taken – analyzing the key roles that education, youth, migration and media are currently playing in relations between societies and proposing actions that could be taken in each of these sectors to improve relations.

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