



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)
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PANEL DISCUSSION

on

**ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS: REFLECTIONS ON BANGLADESH
PERSPECTIVES**

Sunday, 23 May 2010

ADDRESS OF WELCOME BY THE DIRECTOR GENERAL

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Human civilizations started its journey hundreds and thousands of years ago. According to modern science, it is about ten thousand years ago, when human beings started to live in communities and societies. This long journey of mankind, from primitive societies to modern nation-states, was not always very peaceful. Anarchies came in many types and forms, but were eventually overpowered by the desire for peace and stability. For, desire for peace and stability is eternal.

The end of Cold War raised immense hope for a more peaceful world. But it became short lived. New sources of tensions, violence and conflicts emerged. The most alarming among themes is the growing divide between Muslim and Western societies. The controversial theory, 'Clash of Civilizations' in this regard, fuelled radicalism more than the academicians. Today, fear, skepticisms, tensions, violence and conflicts – in short, anarchies of all forms and types - have spread all across the globe.

The eternal desire for peace and stability came to the fore again. In the last one decade, a numbers of efforts were taken by various international organizations, groups, consortiums and others to bridge the rift between religions and cultures. In 2005, at the initiative of the president of Spain and the Prime Minister of Turkey, at the 59th General Assembly of the UN, the Alliance of Civilizations was established under the auspices of the United Nations. The initiative seeks to improve the understanding and cooperative relations among nations and peoples across cultures and religions, and to help counter the forces that fuel polarization, exclusivism and extremism. The Alliance places particular emphasis on defusing tensions between the Western and Islamic world.

As you all know, the UN Secretary General Kofi Annan assembled a High level Group (HLG) consisting of twenty eminent personalities of the world, drawn from policymaking, academia, civil society, religious leadership, and the media. A full range of religions and civilizations were represented.

The HLG met five times between November 2005 and November 2006, and produced a report prioritizing relations between the Western and Muslim societies. The final 2006 report of the HLG was structured in two parts. The part I concludes that the key reasons for the growing divide between Muslim and Western societies are not religions, but political. As such, it suggested certain political steps as prerequisites to any substantial and lasting improvement in the relations between Muslim and Western societies. The part II of the report reflects the HLG's view that tension across cultures have spread beyond the political level into the hearts and minds of populations. To counter this trend, the Group presented recommendations in four main fields – Education, Youth, Migration and Media.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The first two Annual Forums of Alliance of Civilizations were held respectively at Madrid in 2008 and Istanbul in 2009. The Third Annual forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations, scheduled to be held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil on 28-29 May this year, is likely to be attended by presidents, prime ministers and foreign ministers of a large number of countries, representatives of academia, media, private sector, civil society organizations and many other professions. The Forum will discuss a wide variety of pertinent issues like, governance, democracy, development, world order, gender, education, media, cross-cultural interaction, human rights, poverty alleviation, conflict management and a host of other issues.

It is, in this backdrop, that the Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies has decided to organize a panel discussion on the **Alliance of Civilizations: Reflections on Bangladesh Perspectives**. Three presentations would be made by the designated panelist on three relevant topics. The presentations would be followed by open and interactive discussions.

Before concluding, let me express my gratitude to the respected Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh learned panelists for the presentations they would be making shortly, and distinguished participants who would be participating in the open discussion to enliven it through their valued comments, observation and penetrating questions.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I welcome you all once again.

May I now request the session's Chair to commence the proceedings please.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen.