

**STATEMENT BY THE SPANISH SECRETARY OF STATE OF
FOREIGN AND IBEROAMERICAN AFFAIRS
(FORUM FOR THE FUTURE,
DOHA, 13 January 2011)**

Distinguished Co-Chairs,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to attend, as representative of the Spanish Government, the seventh ministerial meeting of the Forum for the Future here in Doha.

This is a most appropriate venue for discussing our common future. As we meet now, the emerging shape of things to come is unfolding in a city like Doha, a country like Qatar and the wider region of the Middle East that are rapidly changing. But even rapid change has to be rooted in firm foundations lest its outcome be ephemeral. **Tolerance and dialogue**, both concepts underpinning our discussions, are precisely two of those solid pillars on which we want to build a future together.

In particular, we are convinced that Spain can make an effective contribution to fostering dialogue between the Arab-Islamic and the Western worlds. History and geography have created a close link between Spain and the Muslim world, indeed this link is an essential component of our identity as a country. Hence our disposition and eagerness to form a part of, or even launch, initiatives aimed at building bridges between Islam and the West.

As you know, the Spanish government has played a key role in two initiatives within international and regional fora, the Alliance of Civilizations and the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, that share with the Forum of the Future a common purpose: the creation of a space for dialogue and cooperation based on practical projects, **actively involving** the civil societies of our respective countries. The three initiatives also share an underlying philosophy, and the aim to foster political, economic and social reform, in order to achieve economic and social progress, as well as to promote universal values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law.

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I would like to refer to the **Alliance of Civilizations**. This initiative, which was launched by the United Nations Secretary-General following a joint proposal from the heads of Governments of Spain and Turkey, **is a good example of a multilateral effort at universal level to improve understanding among cultures and peoples** and to overcome cultural divides by developing cooperative relations among and within societies. The road we have travelled since its first steps in 2005 proves that **this initiative was necessary and timely and is producing results**.

This past year has been particularly important for the activities of the Alliance. Its **Group of Friends** has enlarged to over 125 members with the joining, in particular, of the United States, Saudi Arabia and a number of countries from Latin-America and Africa, thus intensifying the focus on “cultural diversity” in the Alliance agenda. In addition, decisive steps have

been taken towards the regional development of the Alliance through **three regional strategies** for cross-cultural dialogue: the **Strategy for South-Eastern Europe**, agreed in Sarajevo in 2009; the Strategy for the **Mediterranean Region**, reached recently in Malta; and work is well advanced for a **Latin-American Regional Strategy**. In all, over 55 countries and 15 international organizations and other associates are participating so far in these regional processes.

In late 2011, this great city of Doha is scheduled to host the IV Global Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations following those held over the last few years in Madrid, Istanbul and Rio de Janeiro. We are convinced of the innovative capacities and commitment of Qatar to make this Forum a milestone in the development of the Alliance. The goal to have an Alliance which is even more action-oriented and closer to our societies will have an excellent opportunity to be fulfilled on the occasion. I am sure that the Doha Forum will contribute to assure continuity and a new impulse to the various processes included in the agenda of the Alliance and the concrete projects and programs already being implemented in areas such as youth, migrants, education and the media. Certainly, it will be an excellent opportunity for renewal and dynamism of the Alliance under the impulse of the host country. For this endeavour, you can certainly count with the firm support and cooperation from Spain.

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At a regional level, Spain is proud of having played a key role in the development of the **Euro-Mediterranean Partnership**, nowadays

organized around the Union for the Mediterranean whose Secretariat is based in Barcelona.

The Union for the Mediterranean has the same goal of the earlier Barcelona Process begun in 1995, whose *acquis* it has formally acknowledged. It seeks to stimulate regional integration and build up an area of peace and shared prosperity in the Euro – Mediterranean region, through multilateral cooperation. The premises are the same, but the Union for the Mediterranean has focused on the elements of the Barcelona Process that needed to be strengthened, namely: to increase the level of co-ownership among Northern and Southern partners in the region; to enhance the level of the relations between the Euro – Mediterranean partners; and to make the Euro – Mediterranean Partnership more visible to the citizens of the region, through the implementation of specific cooperation projects on the ground.

Spain is working intensely, together with the Co-presidencies of the Union for the Mediterranean and the rest of the parties concerned, to fulfil the goals of the Euro – Mediterranean Partnership, and hopes that the Summit of the Union for the Mediterranean may take place as soon as the situation in the Middle East makes it possible. However, let me stress that dialogue and cooperation in the Mediterranean region cannot wait for the Middle East conflict to be definitively solved, even if it is an overriding goal for which we must constantly work. Indeed, we are convinced that ways have to be found to permit the deepening and enhancing of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, while preserving the institutional framework of the Union for the Mediterranean.


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My country sincerely believes that the **Forum for the Future** is playing a **very positive and significant role** in our common endeavours to attain the crucial goals that bring us together.

Spain welcomes the conclusions and recommendations of the three workshops organised by the Forum in 2010. Today, we are having a very open and fruitful discussion on many subjects of great relevance for the region. Spain agrees with the main ideas expressed in this Forum, in particular the stress on human rights and democracy, the need of economic reform and development, the role of civil society, and the importance of gender issues. I would also like to reiterate the commitment of my country to the successful result of the Middle East Peace Process, which is, as you know, one of the top priorities of our foreign policy. Spain will certainly spare no effort to help in achieving that objective, and let me remind you that this year will mark the 20th anniversary of the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991.

The potential synergies between the Forum for the Future, the Alliance of Civilisations and the Union for the Mediterranean are self – evident, and we should all strive to put those synergies to effective use, above all in these times of economic crisis and financial constraints.

If we work together for common goals, there is no reason why we could not succeed. As Tahar Ben Jelloun once said, there is no such thing as a clash of civilizations, but rather conflicts between uncivilized people. Let us remember the history of **Al-Andalus** in the Iberian Peninsula as a brilliant moment of human civilisation and as a gateway of classical culture into Europe and therefore a fertile ground for the later emergence of the



Renaissance. This shining example bears witness of how our respective identities and cultures interact and enrich each other, and shows the way for our common progress towards a promising future.

Thank you.