



Union for the Mediterranean Senior Officials Meeting

**Brussels, Belgium
31 March 2015**

Presentation of Ambassador Hatem Atallah Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation

Your Excellencies, Co-Presidency and Senior Officials of the Union for the Mediterranean, the EU and Arab League,

Excellency Ambassador Sijilmassi, Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean,

Excellency Ambassador About Bakr Hefny, Chairman of the Anna Lindh Foundation Board of Governors,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I come to you today in my capacity as the newly appointed Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Foundation to thank you all for the support you and your countries have given me, and for the trust you have placed in me to run the Anna Lindh Foundation at a particularly important and sensitive moment of its existence. Sensitive, because after ten years the Foundation must confirm its relevance and its capacity to be a central actor in the field of intercultural dialogue. Sensitive, because it is challenged to offer the alternative to our region's young generation in the midst of the rise of radicalism, xenophobia, and extremism.

It is four weeks since I assumed responsibilities at the Foundation in Alexandria, and the first matter I had to attend to was the internal organization. Having in mind the time constraints and the necessity to get things up and running by 1st April to meet the start of the new phase, I proceeded to put the house in order through an inclusive and transparent process which was necessary to establish in the absence of the required criteria and procedure. Despite its complexity, this exercise was extremely useful as it allowed me to study the full structure and get a good grip on the inner mechanisms of the Foundation's functioning. It also revealed a certain number of procedural, structural and operational aspects which require a thorough analysis in order to clearly apprehend their limitations and their impact on the governance requirements. A more comprehensive study will be conducted and a detailed report will be presented to the Board of Governors in June with suggestions for an improved performance based on transparency, clarity of purpose and a motivating approach aimed at introducing a greater sense of ownership of activities and empowerment of the Anna Lindh Foundation constituency.

During this initial period I also had the opportunity to meet with the entire staff of the foundation who, without any doubt, represent the most important asset of the organization. Dedicated, reliable

and highly professional, they embody the hope and aspirations we all put in intercultural dialogue and the values it carries. I would like to take this opportunity to thank them all for the support they have given me and for the high degree of professionalism they displayed during this transition.

Excellencies,

The tragic events now blowing on several parts of our Euro-Mediterranean region have shocked us all. The most recent being the attack which targeted my country, Tunisia. Our humanity will never allow us to accept such events or even get used to their occurrences. But these events reinforce our determination as they underline once again the values for which we have come together through the Foundation, endeavoring in our diversity and expanding our cultural richness.

The Anna Lindh Foundation has a major role to play and a responsibility to assume. A responsibility towards our own selves, a responsibility towards the future generations and a responsibility towards humanity itself.

The Foundation is today on the eve of a new decade of activities and presence. We are ushering in a new chapter, a second decade in which the Foundation will have to affirm its character, confirm its role and boast its credentials. But for this role to be efficient and make a progressive difference in our region, the Anna Lindh Foundation needs to be more visible, more present and more credible. It cannot position itself on the operational platform as the central Euro-Mediterranean institution for inter-cultural dialogue if it is not recognized for the work it accomplishes and not present in the field. This means that we need to work on an enhanced plan of communication to raise the profile and strive towards a greater name-recognition among the actors in the field. This also means a more transparent management, consistent programs, clarity of purpose and strategic intent.

But what would distinguish the Foundation from other organizations would be the quality of its programs and performance rather than the number of activities conducted which would spread the organization's capacity and means very thin without much impact or consequence. This recognition we seek requires sustained visibility, quality and well-thought-out participation, as well as ensuring the Foundation is embedded by the Euro-Mediterranean institutions as part of the edifice. It must be accepted and recognized as an efficient instrument in the greater endeavor of building our shared space of cooperation and growth and for the proper implementation of the diverse policies adopted by the EU, UfM and its partners in this grand scheme.

Intercultural dialogue is as vast a domain as it is rich and complex. Culture is universal but it is not monolithic. It reflects the infinite multitudes of cultural understandings, dimensions and manifestations in a diversity as promising and fulfilling as it is challenging.

Our culture reveals ourselves, expresses our social realities, presents our daily lives, encrypts and decodes our ambitions and our aspirations. It forms an ensemble which like Da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, links to the center all the components of our existence: our worries, our needs, our ambitions, our environment, our economic aspirations, our growth targets, our security, our faith, the relations we have with others, our understanding of them, the rain and the sunshine which punctuate our seasons; in a word everything. And it is all brought back to the center and this center is you, me, each and every one of us.

In the report of the High-Level Advisory Group on Dialogue Between Peoples and Cultures in the Euro-Mediterranean Area dated October 2003, we can read that "The only way for everyone to creatively construct a common future is to endeavor to steer a path of change together between a resigned fatalism in the face of an essentially economic globalization on the one hand and a retreat into exclusive identity politics on the other. For this to be possible, two conditions must be present:

first a readiness to seek in the dialogue with the Other new reference points for oneself and second, general agreement on the aim of constructing a "common civilization" beyond the legitimate diversity of the cultures that have been handed down. Leopold Sedar Senghor encapsulated this when he said that by living the particular to the full we reach the dawn of the universal. A common civilization naturally looks to the universal, and hence equality, while dialogue thrives on diversity, and hence a taste for difference."

As we enter this second decade of the Anna Lindh Foundation, the diversity, and the various dimensions of our culture, call upon us as a Foundation promoting intercultural dialogue to be present in the major global events, particularly those which anticipate the participation of our central Euro-Med institutions, in order to underline the cultural dimension inherent to every theme in debate, and mobilize public opinion to further promote the notion and the usefulness of intercultural dialogue, to foster a better mutual understanding and a fruitful exchange of best practices in any given situation. This enhanced visibility and the implementation of a well-formulated communication plan and strategy will be determining tools to promote the credibility, transparent nature and coherent purpose of the Foundation.

With President Guigou, we believe that an increased visibility with our institutional structures is an essential component, an unavoidable basis for the approach we are putting in place to ensure for our Foundation a recognition and a perennity beyond the phase cycles which determine currently its life cycles without much clarity for the medium or long term. I believe that it is indeed vital to reconsider this pattern and embark on a deliberate but well-structured approach to move the Foundation from its current project status to a more permanent, well-structured institution giving its action more stability and more coherence in the framework of the common long-term objectives for the Euro-Med region.

What do we want to do with this Foundation? What would it look like 10 or 20 years from now? What position do we want the Anna Lindh Foundation to hold in the Euro-Mediterranean space and in the general structures of cooperation across the Mediterranean?

All these are essential questions which would determine the future of our institution. President Guigou and I are convinced that we must launch the reflection and engage the analysis to prepare the way forward.

We need to give the Anna Lindh Foundation a renewed vision.

In this exercise, I believe, it would be important to reclaim the original spirit which presided over the creation of this Foundation, take stock of the numerous accomplishments achieved during the past decade of the Foundation's existence and look ahead to the next decade and beyond in an attempt to capture the core aspirations of our Euro-Mediterranean societies and devise the best way to be responsive to their expectations in full transparency and clarity of purpose. It is an exercise I have already briefed the managers and staff about but it is an exercise that requires the participation and input of all Euro-Med institutional structures, our partners, the Member States and the Networks. In this important exercise the Board of Governors will have a crucial role to play because without its support and involvement we will not be able to set the course right. We will be taking this journey together with the Board, reviewing our strategic progress at each stage in a joint exercise. I also believe that all our stakeholders need to be involved, the Advisory Council, the Networks and our principal institutional partners.

Being present today in this Senior Official Meeting alongside Ambassador Sijilmassi, and beyond the circumstantial opportunity it offers me to meet you, it is a clear expression of a determined intention to seek a much closer relationship with the Union for the Mediterranean Secretariat and en-

deavor to pool our means and capacities to be more efficient, ensure an increased visibility and maximize the benefits our respective constituencies can reap from a unified effort and a coordinated action.

One of the Foundation's major assets are the Networks. They form its natural constituency and the vehicle which disseminates the values of tolerance, moderation, mutual acceptance and richness through diversity. But the importance of their role goes much further than the actions they carry out in the field. Being in direct close contact with people, they experience directly what others read about, see firsthand what cannot be reported with accuracy: people's reactions and the expression of their inner feelings. Our networks can contribute a great deal to draw a better understanding of the environment we operate in and suggest new areas of action.

Civil society represents the essential *raison d'être* of our Foundation and its contribution to the development of several countries is widely known and recognized. We need to pursue our efforts in helping civil society foster exchanges and dialogue with mutual respect, recognizing differences and on equal terms.

With President Guigou we recognize the sensitivity of the moment and the difficulties that lay ahead but we are equally determined to seize the moment and turn it into an opportunity:

An opportunity to give the Foundation a solid platform to operate on and grow on, an opportunity to contribute to the general effort to stop the spread of the negative tendencies around the Mediterranean, an opportunity to honor the work and commitment of the founding fathers of the Anna Lindh Foundation by striving towards achieving the goals they identified in the original endeavor.

We have today an opportunity to do this and establish the shared strategic vision for the next decade of the ALF by investing in the visibility and sustainability of our action.

The road is long, but the journey of a thousand miles starts with a first step which I will be honored to take with you.

Thank you.