

## **Mme Guigou's Opening speech**

Distinguished Heads of Networks, Dear colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen

Welcome to the Annual Heads of Networks Meeting of the Anna Lindh Foundation. This year's meeting comes to conclude a year of world-shifting events and remarkable anniversaries. As the world is swept with the announcement of the COVID-19 pandemic with its devastating social and economic impact; we commemorate important moments in the history of our interculturalism. This year we celebrate 25 years since the Barcelona process was launched.

Indeed, the COVID-19 pandemic has shed a direct light on our vulnerabilities, it has also presented opportunities that we never thought existed. Opportunities to rethink and revise our disposition towards matters that we take for granted. The purpose of our existence as a Foundation, as a Network of Networks is being put to the test; it is high time Intercultural dialogue and international cooperation overcame the digital divide. The virtual realm, for now offers the most suited medium for us to respond to this world challenge. International cooperation and dialogue are key to identify shared solutions to defeat the virus, but also to build together and ensure the sustainable development of our societies in the aftermath of the current crisis.

I address you today, 3 days after the launch of the Anna Lindh Foundation 15-year Review where using data and statistics, we narrate how the Foundation has created the largest civil society Network in the region as foreseen in its statutes, in those 15 years. From its very beginning, the ALF was conceived as a Network of Networks, established in each of the countries of the Union for the Mediterranean, bringing together over 4,000 civil society organisations who share the values of the Foundation. Since its establishment, the Foundation invested in the development of these Networks, organising local and regional trainings, reinforcing the capacity of members for EuroMediterranean partnership-building and project development.

Our meeting this year holds a special place as it is a manifestation that we could overcome the challenge that the pandemic has set out for us. Despite restrictions

on travel and for the measures for social distancing we need to all observe and respect for safety and health, we meet online for the first time.

This year we hope our meeting is forward looking and allows us to plan well-ahead for the next phase. As you can read off the programme, the sessions are focused on discussing ALF programming for the next phase and funding modalities. More imminent will be the discussions on the Virtual Marathon for Dialogue which we aim to launch as an endeavor by the Network for the Network.

With these final notes I announce meeting started and look forward to all the enriching discussions that will ensue for our common future.