

Jordan, 16<sup>th</sup> of September 2021

**STATEMENT OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE ANNA LINDH FOUNDATION, HRH Rym ALI**

**Remembering President Jorge Sampaio**

**G**athered in Doha, in December 2011, we are all waiting to hear the speech of President Jorge Sampaio, our “host” at this Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilisations (UNAOC) of which he is the UN High Representative since 2007.

As always, in his opening remarks and with an admirable energy, President Sampaio urges all participants to work on bringing about concrete ideas and solutions.

If there is one thing that he wants to see emerge from these high-profile events, it is not just words – it is action.

President Jorge Sampaio does not just talk about dialogue, he believes in it, he practices it, and with his own diverse background, and many achievements, he embodies it. He is passionate about bringing us all together to celebrate our common humanity and about harnessing tools for cooperation and dialogue to bring about peace, regionally and internationally. He spares no efforts to spread that message and act on the humanistic principles that he preaches.

With his rich and dynamic background, it is understandable: President Sampaio has been a man of action all his life.

I had the privilege of meeting him for the first time in Jordan, in 2010, at an event organized by my husband, Prince Ali, President of the Jordanian Football Association. President Sampaio was in Amman with the football player, Luis Figo, then a World Health Organisation Goodwill Ambassador. As the WHO Special Envoy to stop Tuberculosis, President Sampaio’s actions on that trip were aimed at fighting TB around the Mediterranean. My husband introduced us and the President kindly asked me about my work with the Jordan Media Institute which I founded. It never occurred to me then that this encounter would somehow forge a path that would lead me to the work I do today, as President of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Little did I know then that his invitation to the Doha event would only be one of several opportunities I would have to participate in international forums, and share my own thoughts about how the media can be a tool to promote the dialogue between civilisations. After Doha, I was invited to Istanbul and then to Vienna, at the last UNAOC Forum under his presidency.

Following that, I was privileged to be included at a North-South Council of Europe Conference that President Sampaio was organizing in Lisbon, with other members of the civil society from around the Mediterranean, to discuss and seek more ways to improve cooperation among and integration within countries in the region. His tenure at the head of the UNAOC had ended, but anyone who knew president Sampaio, even remotely, would also know that he would not take time to rest or to regroup. He immediately moved into action, again - this time in defense of Syrian refugee students.

And so, in 2018, we were all gathered again, keenly waiting to hear President Sampaio, this time in Lisbon, as he launched his “Global Action for Syrian Students.” President Sampaio had started that initiative to offer emergency scholarships to Syrian students so they could resume or pursue their university studies. And he reached out to all of us present to help find more support for refugees who only needed to be given a chance at enrolling in higher education programmes.



As always, he was brilliant, action-driven and effective, as were so many of the guests he had gathered at the conference.

As the conference drew to an end, I was surprised to find out that I was among a small group of guests who had been recommended to receive, from the current President of Portugal, Marcelo Rebelo de Souza, the order of Prince Henry the Navigator, for my work in the field of culture and intercultural exchange. The man who had recommended me was President Sampaio of course.

Looking back, I realise he was one of the main influences in my recent professional life who encouraged me to constantly place, at the heart of my work, values of mutual understanding and cooperation. He also gave me opportunities to develop these ideas and that work at an international level.

But more than that, he was a powerful example of what can be achieved in the field of cultural exchange and dialogue. He brought together people from very different backgrounds, which in itself created the exchanges and dialogue about which he talked.

I believe all of us at the Anna Lindh Foundation, with which he was very familiar, having been involved in the early years of the Barcelona Process, owe President Sampaio a huge debt of gratitude: for his relentless achievements in bringing people, organisations and countries together to talk and build bridges; for his faith that progress in this field could be achieved despite acknowledging the “increasing difficulties we experience in living together” within our diverse societies; for being genuine about finding solutions when many would have resorted to cynicism and given up; for not shying away from tackling complex issues such as the integration of Muslims in Europe, with his characteristic determination, convinced that not only was such an integration the only solution, but also that justice would guide such integration processes.

In 2008, the year of Intercultural Dialogue, addressing European Members of Parliament, he called for new policies to be applied at all levels, from “democratic governance of cultural diversity” to education in human rights, citizenship and religions and beliefs.

Undeterred by the crises our world was witnessing, President Sampaio established an action plan for cooperation between the European Union and the UNAOC and referred to the Union for the Mediterranean as another area where the UNAOC was “keen to collaborate.” He concluded that “cultural diversity should go hand in hand with the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, equal opportunities for all, economic solidarity and social cohesion.”

For all of us who, at the Anna Lindh Foundation, work hard to promote and develop intercultural dialogue through concrete actions, President Sampaio is a role model, who truly acted as a beacon. We will miss his wisdom, his brilliant ideas and his moral leadership.

The light he cast on how to bring about real, in-depth, intercultural dialogue has not disappeared with his passing away.

It is up to us however, to make it last, by making sure that what we discuss, what we publish and what we announce, have practical resonance and practical implications and that they lead to concrete results on the ground.



It is up to us to make the “mind shift among divided communities” that he wanted to see happen and demonstrate by working closely with societies and governments, how right President Sampaio was to believe that it is possible, even with the limited means at our disposal, to bring about a cohesion of civilisations, while respecting fundamental freedoms and supporting equal economic opportunities in every possible way.

HRH Rym ALI

