

ACHIEVEMENTS INTRODUCTION

Consistent with the strategic guidelines and choices defined by the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization to disseminate the culture of dialogue among the Arab and other cultures, ALECSO has undertaken a number of activities and initiatives:

1- Holding more meetings and strengthening relations with institutions, organizations and prominent figures and thinkers in the fields of culture, education, and information, who strongly believe in the values of dialogue and cultural interaction and who belong to different civilizations. This aims at combining the efforts of all those who believe in human values to stand against those who call for "the clash of cultures and civilizations" which include negative views and attitudes.

2- Signing a number of agreements with organizations, institutions, universities, and cultural and educational symposiums stressing the importance of dialogue among cultures, particularly between the Arab and other cultures, and carrying out a number of joint academic, intellectual, and educational activities to back up this positive trend practically in the different fields.

3- Holding symposiums and seminars attended by a number of prominent Arab and non-Arab researchers belonging to different universities and cultural institutions throughout the world. These conferences dealt with cultural and intellectual subjects and issues and resulted in recommendations and initiatives. The most important of these will be detailed in the second part of the book.

These conferences were on:

- Dialogue between the Arab and other cultures.
- Afro-Arab cultural dialogue.
- Arab-Chinese dialogue.
- Arab-Iberian American cultural dialogue.
- Arab-European cultural dialogue.
- Arab-Russian dialogue.

Role of information in Arab-Western cultural communication.

The efforts made by ALECSO, as far as dialogue among civilizations is concerned, have engendered a variety of cultural spaces throughout the world, which the Organization has been open on, linking a big number of cultures nowadays. Dialogue is expected to extend, and include the German culture (which has already started with the Arab participation in the Frankfurt Book Fair in 2004), the Japanese and Latin cultures so that Arab culture will be an important part of the dialogue among all cultures of the world.

Symposium on "Dialogue between the Arab culture and Other World Cultures": A First Step towards diversified Dialogue

The first steps undertaken by the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization towards dialogue between the Arab Culture and other cultures in the late twentieth century were in cooperation with the Tunisian Ministry of Culture. This aimed to celebrate the choice of Tunis as regional cultural capital in 1997 by holding an international conference on "Dialogue between the Arab Culture and other World Cultures".

Participants in this conference included prominent intellectuals and researchers belonging to different Arab countries, Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States of America. They discussed the realities of cultural relations between Arabs and other civilizations and worked on planning for sound and balanced future dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding between the different parties.

The papers presented at the conference were on the following themes:

- Arab culture and the Cultures of Africa, Asia and Latin America.
- Arab culture and the West.
- Arabs and the world: Future prospects of political dialogue and economic exchange within the new world system.

The conference achieved a number of aims as it has strengthened links between Arab and foreign researchers and enabled them to exchange views about the importance of dialogue among cultures in the particular world context today. The conference closed proceedings with a number of recommendations:

- Stressing the fact that dialogue among cultures is based on agreement on a number of basic principles, the first being human unity and the second is respecting the cultural characteristics of every society. The importance of human dialogue is closely related to being able to achieve a balance between these two principles.

- Emphasizing openness, an important feature of Arab culture throughout history. Arab culture has always been able to change, believing in positive interaction, and rejecting conflicts.

- Attaching importance to studying and teaching cultures at Arab universities and encouraging students in higher education to specialize in different world cultures.

- Exchanging students and scholarships with centres of world cultures and holding the international conference on teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages.

- Setting up joint cultural institutions with other cultures to stress common responsibility in carrying on dialogue, exchanging cultural creations and productions and supporting institutions that are part of this action such as universities and research centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

- Strengthening links between expatriate Arab communities and holding conferences for their representatives to define their role in connecting the Arab culture and the

societies where they live.

- Inviting Arab businessmen to finance inter-cultural activities such as translation, scholarships, exhibitions, and concerts.

- Translation is a main condition to promote dialogue between cultures. Subsequently, a whole plan to translate into Arabic world masterpieces, in the different fields of knowledge, should be adopted.

This conference provided a sound basis for other conferences between the Arab culture and other world cultures as set out in the following pages.

AFRO-ARAB DIALOGUE

ALECSO has strived for the stance of dialogue to prevail among cultures and civilisations in all areas and among all human communities without distinction. However, it gives a special place to improved and deep-rooted dialogue between the Arab and African cultures. This has caused the phrase "Afro-Arab culture" to replace "Arab African culture" in Alecso's literature. This usage cannot apply to any other world culture, no matter how positive its interaction with Arab culture.

This mutual interpenetration and integration stems from a number of reasons, mainly the following:

- At geographic, human, and civilizational level, Arabs genuinely belong in the African continent;
- Africa was the first place in which the Islamic message took shelter, and found supporters, for the first group of Muslim refugees went to Ethiopia to escape the tyranny of unbelievers in Mecca;
- Arabic, the most widespread African language, is indeed more widely spoken in Africa than any other single African language;
- The Arabic script played an important part in the writing of African languages. Numerous manuscripts in major libraries throughout the world are proof of this. Clearly, they also show that, through the Arabic script, Africans have contributed to enriching world culture.
- Relations between the Arabic and African languages were positive, and free from the hegemonic, deprecatory, and marginalizing attitudes that have characterized the stance of European languages since the colonial era;
- This positive interaction between the Arab-Islamic and native African cultures is demonstrated by the important role of numerous African and Arab scholars and intellectuals in enriching all these cultures, and upgrading their mutual interpenetration, assimilation, and integration;

Arab-Islamic culture did not deal with the different aspects of African culture as a conqueror and hegemonic colonizer. What prevailed in their relationship were the values of equality, mutual enrichment, and benefiting from what they had in common and what was positive, in the service of the Afro-Arab community, and the entire humankind.

This positive interaction was crystallized in an authentic, deep-rooted, common identity. This permitted to defeat all colonialist attempts to sow discord between Africans and Arabs through fabricated racial, religious, cultural, or geographic differences such as:

- Black vs. white Africa,
- North Africa as opposed to Sub-Saharan Africa.

This common cultural identity also made it possible to thwart the aims of colonialist and neo-colonialist powers, namely to blot out aspects of Arab-Islamic civilization in Africa by:

- Attempting to eliminate the Arabic script and replace it by the Latin alphabet in writing African languages;
- Asserting that the attachment of Africans to Arabs and Muslims is an attachment to backwardness, and leads away from progress and modernity;
- Undertaking linguistic studies aimed at finding phonic, structural or other similarities between African (Hausa, Swahili, Wolof, etc.) and European languages.
- Making every effort to curtail the teaching of Arabic in African countries, and spread the teaching of European languages in schools, colleges, and universities.

ALECSO's Efforts to Improve Afro-Arab Dialogue

ALECSO has spared no effort, in the context of its strategic options, to support this dialogue. It has consistently worked for consolidating its foundations, and extending its scope. This was clearly shown in the "**Comprehensive Plan for Arab Culture**" (1986), and the "**Action Plan 2005-2010.**" In this regard, ALECSO has made a number of achievements, and taken a number of actions and initiatives. The most important of these are:

1. Founding the Khartoum International Arabic Language Institute in 1974 (only a few years after ALECSO itself was created).

The Institute, from which hundreds have graduated, makes considerable efforts to train teachers of Arabic for speakers of other languages in Africa and Asia. Its students, in particular postgraduates, carry out comparative studies between the Arabic and African languages, in phonology, grammar, and syntax.

These studies helped make better known possible relations between Arabic and African languages. This helped bring them closer together and fostered their interaction in addition to the benefit derived at scientific and pedagogic level.

2. In 1978, ALECSO published an important number of studies under the title of "Afro-Arab relations: a multidimensional analytical study."

These excellent studies dealt with the course of the Afro-Arab relationship from antiquity (early Christian era) to the Middle Ages, the colonial period, and contemporary times. They also examined possibilities of cooperation and positive interaction between Arabs and Africans, consistent with their historical and religious roots, and the role of Islam and geography in reviving and consolidating these roots.

ALECSO published these studies to implement the decisions of the first Afro-Arab ministerial conference held in Dakar, Senegal in 1976, which adopted the African cultural charter. This is also consistent with the Cairo declaration adopted by the Afro-Arab summit held in Cairo in March 1977. The declaration had pointed out the importance of cooperation in the social, cultural, scientific, and educational fields to strengthen the bonds uniting the peoples of Africa (Arabs and Africans);

3. In cooperation with the Institute of African and Asian Studies at Khartoum University, ALECSO held **a symposium on the relationship between the Arab and African cultures**, February 21-26, 1981. The symposium was attended by a number of Arab and African researchers representing several Arab and African international and regional organizations. The main themes of the symposium were:

- The roots of relations between the Arab and African cultures,
- Negative effects of Western colonization on these relations,
- African languages and cultures.

The symposium made a number of recommendations to strengthen Afro-Arab relations. These include:

- Writing a comprehensive history of Afro-Arab cultural relations,
- Carrying out a study of Islamic societies in Africa,
- Undertaking research on the image of the Arab in the African curricula and media, and that of the African in the Arab curricula and media,
- Encouraging two-way translations of African and Arab works,

4. In cooperation with the Mauritanian Institute of National languages (Fulani, Wolof, Soninke), ALECSO convened **a symposium in Nouakchott in 1983 to study common features of Arabic and African languages**. The symposium was attended by Arab and African researchers who undertook a precise scientific study of relations between these languages, their several historical roots, and the role of the Arabic script in writing and propagating African cultures.

5. In cooperation with the African Cultural Institute, ALECSO organized **a meeting on relations between Arabic and African languages**, in Dakar, Senegal, April 12-19, 1984. The meeting was attended by a select group of Arab and African intellectuals and scholars specializing in linguistics, social sciences, and the history of Afro-Arab relations.

The papers presented at this meeting, like those of the Nouakchott symposium, emphasized the long standing relations between Arabs and Africans and their positive interactions. This called for strengthening them and remedying the errors and misrepresentations that have affected them. These had resulted from the attempts of a number of Western researchers with ulterior motives of a colonialist and racist nature.

The papers presented at this meeting also tackled the issue of Arabic manuscripts, literary works, and documents, which number in the thousands. They also raised the subject of African languages written in Arabic script, which exceed thirty thousand. The most important of these are Hausa, Fulani, Swahili, Soninke, Wolof, Mandingo, etc. The meeting made a number of recommendations and scientific proposals to strengthen Afro-Arab relations in the areas of language and culture.

6. ALECSO participated in the symposium organized by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States on **the humanistic aspect of Islamic civilization and its role**

in strengthening Afro-Arab cooperation in November 1985 in Cairo. The symposium stressed the significance of the humanistic and civilizational aspect of Afro-Arab relations. It put emphasis on the long history, intellectual depth, and spiritual dimension of these relations.

7. In cooperation with the Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society (CASAS), and the Arab Research Centre for Afro-Arab Studies (ARCAASD), ALECSO held a **seminar on "Afro-Arab Cultural Dialogue"** in Cape Town, South Africa on March 22-24, 1999. The seminar studied the following themes:

- The history and promotion of Afro-Arab cooperation,
- Cultural dimensions of Afro-Arab cooperation,
- Understanding Arabness and Africanness at the close of the 20th century,
- The African literary heritage in Arabic script,
- Prospects of Afro-Arab cooperation in the fields of research, science, and technology,
- Social, economic, and political problems of Afro-Arab cooperation, and features of concurrence between the two communities.

Participants in the seminar reached a number of conclusions and recommendations, mainly the following:

- Affirming the centrality of culture in relations between the two regions,
 - Strengthening relations between intellectuals and researchers through holding symposia and seminars,
- Correcting the misconceptions that may hamper future cooperation,
- Undertaking studies and applied research work on the content of school curricula and media coverage of the two regions, and the role of curricula in their perception of one another,
- Studying African literature in Arabic script and Islamic art as a basis for social and cultural interaction,
- Making Afro-Arab dictionaries,
- Translating major Arabic and African works,
- Undertaking joint field research on the image of the people of each region in the eyes of the people of the other region, at the level of the man in the street and the elite, and the contributing factors in creating this image,
- Enhancing the role of civil society and NGOs in Afro-Arab cultural interaction,

8. In collaboration with the World Islamic Call Society, ALECSO organized a **training session for Arabic inspectors and teachers** in Niamey, Niger, on 13-25 May, 2000. The session was attended by many educationalists and specialists in Arab-Islamic civilization, African cultures, and the history of Afro-Arab relations.

9. The ALECSO-affiliated International Arabic Language Institute at Khartoum organized a **symposium on writing African languages in Arabic script** on 29-30

December 2001 at the Institute building. The objectives of this symposium were the following:

- Preserving the cultural heritage written in Arabic script,
- Meeting the needs of African societies in the use of Arabic script,
- Promoting the Arabic language and Islamic culture,

The symposium studied the following themes:

- The role of Arabic script in writing such African languages as Hausa, Fulani, and Somali, in addition to local languages in Sudan,
- The action of international and regional organizations in support of African languages written in Arabic script, in particular:
 - o The Islamic Development Bank,
 - o ISESCO,
 - o The International Arabic Language Institute at Khartoum,
- Problems confronting the Arabic script, including:
 - o Computer use in writing African languages in Arabic script
 - o Technical problems

The symposium made important recommendations aimed at paying increased attention to this subject because of the role it plays in strengthening Afro-Arab relations in the areas of language and culture.

10. In collaboration with the World Islamic Call Society, and in coordination with the Ministry of Culture in the republic of Mali, and the University of Bamako, ALECSO organized a **cultural and scientific symposium on "Arab-Islamic Culture in the African Sahel Region: Past, Present, and Future."** The symposium was held on 4-6 June, 2002, at the Bamako Conference Hall.

One of the objectives of the symposium was to support Arab-Islamic culture and the Arabic language in the African Sahel region. The symposium also aimed at strengthening the bonds of brotherhood and cooperation between the Arab world and the African Sahel region. It made recommendations in support of Afro-Arab brotherhood.

11. ALECSO and The World Islamic Call Society, in collaboration with the University of N'djamena, the Chadian Faculty of Arab-Islamic Studies, and King Faisal University in Chad, organized a **symposium on the "Contrastive and Comparative Linguistic Study of Arabic and the Languages of the African Sahel Countries,"** on 28-30 October, 2002, in N'djamena, Republic of Chad.

The main objectives of the symposium included:

- Supporting Arab-Islamic culture and the Arabic language in the African Sahel region,
- Strengthening the bonds of brotherhood, cooperation, and complementarity between the Arab world and the African Sahel region, in the interest of both parties at present and in future, and in support of their cultural identity,

- Gaining objective, scientific knowledge of mutual linguistic influences between the Arabic language and the national languages of the African Sahel countries,
- Gaining a knowledge of the linguistic influence and civilizational role of the Arabic language in the African Sahel region,
- Promoting studies on the interaction between the Arabic and African languages and on African languages written in Arabic script, and making use of these studies at educational and cultural level,
- Strengthening links and relations of cooperation between Arab and African researchers with an interest in this field,

Arab and African researchers presented papers on different linguistic and cultural aspects relevant to the theme of the symposium. In conclusion, this international symposium recommended mainly the following:

- Calling on Arabic departments in the academic institutions of Chad and the other African Sahel countries to pay greater attention to linguistics in terms of teaching, researching, and applying it,
- Calling on ISESO to take further action to promote the use of the Arabic script in writing African languages,
- Translating into Arabic major European studies on African languages and their relations with Arabic to make them available to Arab and African researchers.

12. From 17-19 January 2003, the ALECSO headquarters hosted **the third meeting of the Executive Council of the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute**. At this meeting, proceedings were focused on putting together the Institute's working mechanisms, and adopting its statutes, organizational chart, and scientific programme.

13. On 15-17 April 2004, ALECSO and the World Islamic Call Society in cooperation with the Sheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal, convened a **symposium on "History, Cultural Symbols, and Identity."** The objective of the symposium, as stated in its presentation paper, was to stress the importance of cultural symbols in history and in assessing Islamic historical events. The symposium also aimed to study the specific features of Islamic culture, in order to strengthen the sense of belonging and cultural unity among Islamic countries. Another objective of the symposium was to analyze the constituents of African identity, and its cultural, spiritual, intellectual, artistic, and material features. In this, the approaches used aimed to study the history, present situation, and future of African identity.

The symposium made recommendations which include:

- Holding an annual symposium of Arab and African academics on the history and cultural identity of Africa. The symposium will convene in turn in Arab and African countries. Encourage the creation of multidisciplinary research teams.
- Continuing with the setting up of departments of African civilisations, cultures, and languages in Arab universities, and departments of Arabic in African universities

- Setting up a pioneering modern project for the collection repair and editing of African manuscripts in Arabic script. These play a decisive part in making known the treasures of African culture, and in promoting a proper, objective writing of history.

14. ALECSO participated in **the symposium held by the Afro-Arab Cultural Institute in Bamako**, Mali, on 13 April 2004, to commemorate the second anniversary of its foundation. The theme of the symposium was the "Afro-Arab relationship". Like similar Arab and African meetings, the symposium studied the deep-rooted character of this relationship and the need to continue publicizing and supporting it in various fields.

15. ALECSO participated in **the symposium** organized by the Sudanese government at the opening of the "**Khartoum, capital of Arab culture in 2006**" events. The main theme of the symposium was "Afro-Arab culture."

On this occasion, Dr Mongi Bousnina, Director General of ALECSO, gave a paper in which he analyzed ALECSO' vision, and the role it plays in setting up this unifying Afro-Arab cultural concept on a sound basis. He also reviewed ALECSO's major initiatives and activities in this field, and the agreements it signed with numerous scientific and cultural institutions in Africa. This, he stated, will help strengthen this trend in practical policy, within the framework of the strategic vision, as set out in ALECSO's Action Plan for 2005-2010.

The Arab-Asian Dialogue

The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization attaches importance to the Arab-Asian dialogue as one of its strategic vision as regards dialogue between the Arab and other cultures. Two main factors support this dialogue:

- The old historic relations between the Arab-Islamic culture and Asian cultures:

Interaction and relations between the Arab culture and Asian cultures date back to old history at geographical and human levels, particularly with the privileged role played by a number of prominent Asian literary and scientific figures in the different fields of language, religion, astronomy and medicine, enriching the Arab-Islamic culture

- The current and particularly future strategic importance of Asian countries:

The research conducted by renowned international future studies centres has stressed the importance of many Asian countries mainly China and India and their leading role in the international scene in the future.

Because of these historical and future considerations, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization attaches considerable importance to strengthen the dialogue between the Arab culture and the cultures of these societies whose main features are old civilizations and high demography. Accordingly, ALECSO's present programmes and projects relating to this field are not but a starting point towards a more global and extended work in the future.

1. Arab Chinese Dialogue

1/ The interaction between the Arab-Islamic and Chinese cultures is as old as history, dating back to the advent of Islam to China.

There is no doubt that the Islamic conquests had played a fundamental role in strengthening the cultural and religious ties between China and the Arabs, especially that the Islamic religion had established itself in China more through concord and trade relations than through the force of arms.

It was within this context that some Chinese groups were converted to Islam, laying down the basis of a Chinese Muslim communities.

The same token, the Arab traders had pioneered the way to the consolidation of Arab-Chinese cultural interaction.

And with having of a big Muslim community in China, the two sides started exchanging religions, commercial and scientific visits with a view to getting acquainted and exploring the various cultural and scientific possibilities that the other side might have to offer in terms of skills and know-how.

Accordingly, some medical and scientific books were translated from Chinese into Arabic, just as the Chinese benefited from the Arab expertise in astronomy, calendar, mathematics and architecture.

In recent and modern history and with the Ottoman's occupation of the Arab states and the mounting European pressure and rivalry with the Ottomans on the one hand and the European occupation of China since the mid. 17th Century on the other hand, had undermined the ties between the Arabs and China. It was only after the first world war that the contact between the two sides had seen renewed when big numbers of Chinese students joined AL-Azhar Mosque to from their studies. At the same time, several translations of the Coran and a lot of other religious books were made into Chinese.

Then came the show but gradual diplomatic recognition of the People's Republic of China in the arabs since the mid 1950's and strengthening the economic relations between China and the Arab countries, giving rise to growing cultural contact between the two sides.

This development in cultural, economic and political relations was accompanied by a growing Chinese interest in the Arabic language and Arab-Islamic civilization .

This interest has manifested itself in the introduction of the Arabic language and civilization as an academic subject in many Chinese universities and Islamic higher institutes that come wider the Chinese Islamic associations and in the local Arab Islamic Schools run by eminent Chinese Islamic personalities and institutions.

Another token of the Chinese care for the Arabic language and culture has been the numerous translations of the holy Coran and the publication of Arabic scientific and literary books translated directly from Arabic or written by Chinese scholars, in addition

of the proliferate of scientific societies concerned with the Arabic language and the Arab Islamic civilization

Among these we can cite the Arabic language society in china, the Chinese association for Arabic literature studies, the Institute for the research in Arabic-Islamic Cortication of Peking the Center for Studies in Eastern cultures that comes under the Chinese Academy of social sciences, and the institute for the Research in the dole eastern cultures at the university of foreign languages in "Chuugmai"

2/In order to give a further boost to these ancient ties that have always existed between the Arab and Chinese nations the ALECSO and the University of Foreign studies of Peking signed a draft agreement in 1997, which triggered an active partnership between the two sides, most importantly aiming at spreading the Arabic language and culture through the faculty of Arabic language at the University of foreign studies of Peking. This agreement has also pored the way for intensified cultural dialogue between the Arab world and China over the past years.

3/ Within this spirit, the international conference which was held in Tunis in 1997 under the patronage of ALECSO and relating to the dialogue between the Arab and the other cultures was an occasion for laying down the general framework for the Arab and Chinese dialogue.

It was then that Dr. "Lee Chee Chung", Professor at the Faculty of Foreign languages and cultures of Peking, presented a comparative study of Arabic and Chinese cultures stressing the characteristics of both cultures and the fact that both are deeply-rooted in history and putting emphasis on the role of Islam, after its advent to China, in blending the two cultures and the introduction of Arab-Islamic medical sciences and astronomy into China. And towards the end of his presentation, Dr. Lee Chee Chung enumerated some of the levels of the Arabe presence in modern China, mainly at regards the teaching of Arabic, translation from Arabic to Chinese and setting up, Scientific institutions concerned with the Arabic language and the Arab Islamic civilization.

4/ During the conference on Chinese and Arabic cultural relations in the 21st Century, which was organized in Peking on 23 - 27 August 1999, by the ALECSO in collaboration with the University of Foreign Studies (Faculty of the Arabic language), the question of interaction and between the Arab and Chinese cultures was stressed. Central to the debates within this conference were papers covering five big chapters dealing with the Chinese Arab cultural relations from all view points and these are:

- The Arab Chinese relations in the field of politics.
- The Arab Chinese relations in the field of language and literature.
- The Arab Chinese relations in the field of arts in information.
- The Arab Chinese relations in the field of culture.
- The prospects for avails Chinese relations.

Papers were prepared and presented by 20 researchers from China and the Arab world and were thoroughly discussed by those professors who attended the conference and enriched the debates with their views and ideas.

Concerning the political chapter, the conference frenzied on the position of the Arab world towards Chinese issues and the Chinese stand on Arab issues, in other words, and the Arab Chinese relations on the world political scene.

The papers relating to language and culture treated the realities and expectations of teaching Arabic in China, the presence of the Chinese language in the Arab world and translation from an intro Chinese and Chinese literary studies in the Arab world, respectively.

As regards, the information chapter, the conference dealt with the image of China both in the Arab media and Chinese media in Arabic.

Culturally, attention was focused on studying the relics and traces of the Arabs in China all through history and the question of cultural relations between the Arab world and China within the context of globalisation.

The last chapter in this conference looked to the future and was devoted to perceiving the possibilities of cultural relations between the Arabs and Chinese and the means of promoting and advancing these relations.

During the round of session, a lot of the creation of the China-Arab dialogue Forum and holding cyclical cultural conferences through collaboration between the ALECSO and the Chinese Universities and institutes concerned with Arabic studies.

The working session that Dr. Mongi Bousnina, the Director General of ALECSO, had in Peking in June 2004 was an opportunity to revive some of these recommendations and give a boost to the Arab Chinese cultural Chinese through the draft-agreement signed on June 30, 2004 between the ALECSO and the faculty of the Arabic language at the university of Foreign Studies of Peking.

One of the most important pints included in the draft agreement is the organization of the second session of the conference on Arab-Chinese dialogue in Peking, most likely in October 2005.

The conference will deal with several issues such as the cultural and media discourse in the context of globalisation, exchanging experience relating to educational systems, translation from and into Arabic and Chinese, cultural diversity and the preservation of heritage. An exhibition of Arabic books and ALECSO publications are also on the agenda of the conference.

The draft agreement also stipulates the translation of Chinese scientific works into Arabic through the Center for Arabization, Translation, and Publications in Damascus, which comes under the ALECSO.

Also, in the field of translation, the two sides agreed on the translation of selected samples of literary works and intellectual creation from and into Arabic and Chinese and corking out the necessary from work for the implementation of this agreement in close collaboration with Chinese and Arab publishers.

ALECSO and the University of Foreign Studies of Peking have also agreed on holding an Arab cultural week in Peking in collaboration with the Arab Ministries of Cultures. The project will be submitted to the Arab Ministers of Culture in their next conference in Sanaa-Yemen during the last quarter of 2004.

Regarding the question of teaching Arabic for Chinese students, the two sides agreed to organize an international conference in Peking to deal with such issues as teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, and a two-week training course on behalf of those involved in teaching Arabic in China, which will be sponsored by the ALECSO. The organization will also bring its support to the revision and publication of the "Contemporary Arabic Chinese Dictionary", compiled by a group of Chinese teachers from within and outside the university.

The agreement also encourages exchanging publications and reviews related to teaching and studying the Arabic language and culture between ALECSO and the University of Foreign Studies of Peking. It also stipulates upgrading the database concerning Chinese teachers in the Arabic language and civilization and teaching them in China, along with conferring privileges provided by ALECSO upon Chinese graduate students in the Arabic language and civilization. And in accordance with the terms of the agreement, ALECSO will also provide for the invitation of Chinese academics to take part in the conferences relating to dialogue that the organization holds with the different cultural and linguistic circles.

2 - Arab-Japanese Dialogue

Cultural interaction between the Arab world and Japan is fairly recent, as both parties had long had no relations. Interaction started towards the end of the nineteenth century, but remained ineffective and limited due to the Western presence in, and domination of, the Arab world at that time and later.

In the beginning, Japan took advantage of both the positive and negative aspects of the modernization movement led by Mohamed Ali in Egypt and Syria in the first half of the nineteenth century. Japanese delegations came to Egypt to study its experience of mixed courts since Japan, like Egypt, had to set up this kind of court at the time under great European pressure. Despite the limited aims of their mission, Japanese delegates studied the Egyptian modernization experience at different levels and reported them in many documents.

Dialogue between the Arabs and Japanese was hindered for decades when most of the Arab lands were under European occupation. And while some Arab intellectuals showed interest in Japanese development despite a total absence of Arab scientific research on Japan, the Japanese carried on their scientific research on the Arab world, though they were influenced by western views. Subsequently, cultural dialogue and interaction remained individual and irregular during the first two thirds of the twentieth century, as support from scientific and cultural institutions was lacking.

However, awareness of common interests among the Arabs and Japanese increased during the last third of the previous century through intensive individual meetings. There soon emerged an urgent need to initiate collective dialogue between Arab and Japanese intellectuals. In a short period of time, from 1979 to 1992, five conferences on dialogue between both parties were held, three in Japan, and two in the Arab world (Jordan). These conferences brought together intellectuals from both parties who were aware of the importance of Arab-Japanese dialogue

These relations were strengthened when, year after year, a growing number of Arab students learned Japanese, and did their PhDs in Japan. It became obvious that Arabs had reached direct cultural interaction with the history, civilization, heritage, and development of Japan. At the same time, the number of young Japanese researchers interested in studying the Arab world increased to the extent that some of them specialized in sensitive Arab subjects.

When trade relations between Japan and the Arab world developed in the second half of the twentieth century, it was felt that they needed to be backed up by strong cultural relations and dialogue. Action by individual Arab countries or Japan was envisaged at the end of the last century and the beginning of the present one (exchanging cultural events or holding symposiums on dialogue). A Tunisian-Japanese symposium on dialogue was organized by the "Bait El Hikma" Academy on 2-3 May 2001 in Tunisia.

At pan- Arab level, the Arab group at UNESCO organized a conference entitled "Cultural Diversity and Globalization: The Arab-Japanese Experience, A Dialogue between Regions" in May 2004 at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. This was within the framework of programme "ARABIA," which was carried out by UNESCO in collaboration with the Arab group.

Nevertheless, there is still a need for a long-term Arab-Japanese dialogue through a national institution. High officials in ALECSO along with academics, intellectuals, and Japanese politicians thought of supporting this dialogue when ALECSO's Director General took part in the international conference on dialogue among cultures held in Tokyo and Kyoto, Japan in July 2001, which was jointly organized by UNESCO and the United Nations University in Tokyo. Other opportunities for this arose when the conference on "Dialogue among Cultures: From Theory to Practice", organized by ISESCO, was held in November 2001 in Tunis, or during visits paid to the ALECSO's headquarters by Japanese academics, diplomats and intellectuals.

In light of these contacts, it was envisaged that a conference on dialogue between the Arab and Japanese cultures may be held during ALECSO's 2005-2006 or 2006-2007 budgetary years. There is great hope that this conference will be the starting point of uninterrupted cultural dialogue in different forms.

Arab-European Dialogue: "Learning to Live Together"

Although they belong to distinct geographical and cultural sites, the Arab and European worlds are greatly interconnected to the extent that we might wonder about the real dividing line between them. Their cultures are grounded in the same monotheistic religions, and the common heritage of ancient Egypt, ancient Greece and ancient Rome. In addition, their territories and populations are interrelated, and their joint economic and strategic prospects make no doubt. Dialogue between them is therefore no mere luxury. A vital necessity, it seems from the facts of, and recent developments in, the geopolitical situation, as well as mutual interest.

At another level, the Arab cultural relation to Europe is not one of severance and alienation, as irresponsible writings would have it. Indeed in the process of European modernity, the Arab cultural heritage was assimilated and lauded. Similarly, the values of the modern European Enlightenment inspired the generation of Arab reformers like Tahtaoui, Kheireddine Tounsi, and Mohamed Abdou. According to these men such sources posed no threat to religion or identity, they rather provided enrichment to their culture.

On the other hand, it must be stressed that the Arab and European parties agree at different levels on strengthening dialogue and cooperation between them either within the framework of the National Committees' working group on Euro-Arab dialogue, or through cooperation between ALECSO and the council of Europe in the fields of education and culture. Such is also the case when the Organization held a number of symposiums during the previous years on cultural dialogue with Europe. These included the Euro-Arab dialogue, held in Paris in July 2002, the Arab-East Europe dialogue, convened in Bucharest in February 2002, the Arab-Iberian-American dialogue held the same year in Tunis, the Arab-Russian dialogue held in Hammamet, Tunisia in 2003, and the Euro-Arab information dialogue, hosted by UNESCO headquarters in March 2004. Other dialogues are being planned by ALECSO between the Arab culture and the German and Latin-based cultures. Joint programmes are also being implemented with European organizations such the council of Europe, and a number of international and regional organizations whose activities partly cover Europe. These include the Organization of Iberian-American States for Education, sciences and Culture, the International Organization Of French-Speaking Countries and the Latin Union.

Here are the most important stages of dialogue held by ALECSO between the Arab and European spaces.

1- The Euro-Arab Conference on Dialogue of Cultures: Background of acquaintance for a living together

After a break with the Euro-Arab relations, cultural dialogue was carried on, led by the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. On initiative of

ALECSO and in collaboration with the World Islamic Society and the Arab World Institute in Paris, a conference was held, on 15-16 July 2002 in the Arab World Institute in Paris, on the Euro-Arab dialogue of cultures to discuss the background of acquaintance for a living together based on tolerance between civilizations and religions.

This conference aimed at discussing views about the background for a dialogue between the Arab world and the European area, and studying ways of developing it for a better coexistence through the meeting of Arab and European thinkers and intellectuals.

The debate focused on three major themes: issue of otherness, culture of peace and acquaintance and recognition. The papers presented by politicians, academics, researchers, creators and media figures emphasized the notion of dialogue, its conditions and ethics as well as the role of religions. In addition, papers have also dealt with the status, the image and the relation with the Other, as well as the contribution of education to a better knowledge and recognition of other subjects relating to the culture of peace and ways of reinforcing it have also been approached.

The participants in the conference, included of the Arab side, Mr Ahmed Sidki Eddajani, Palestinian researcher and thinker, Mohamed Ghanem Rmihi, Secretary-General of Kuwaiti National Council of Culture and Arts, Jaber Osfour, Secretary-General of the Egyptian High Council of Culture, Allal Sinasser, Adviser of his Majesty The King Mohamed VI, Salah Stétié, Lebanese writer and poet, Ahmed Youssef Ahmed, Director of the Arab Studies and Research Centre, Salah Fadhl, Egyptian critic and researcher, Sayed Yassine, adviser of Al Ahram Strategic Studies Centre, Mohamed Sayed Ahmed writer for "Al Ahram" newspaper, Mehdi M'birich, former secretary of the popular general committee for education in the Arab Libyan Jamahiriya, Fahmi khshim, President of the Union of Writers in Jamahiriya of Libya, Mohamed Mustapha Kabbaj, Secretary-General of the Academy of the kingdom of Morocco and others.

The European side included Mr Philip Séguin, Former President of the French National Assembly, Paul Balta, French writer and journalist, Hervé Bourges, President of the International Union of Journalists and the French-Speaking Union of Journalism, Edgar Morin, French philosopher and sociologist, Italian Senator Lidovico Corrao, President of the Orestiad Foundation in Naples, Maurice Rieutord, Secretary-General of Robert Schuman Institute in Europe, Thomas Philipp, professor at Erlangen University in Germany, Joseph Seifert, President of the International Academy of Philosophy, Jesus Gonzalez Lopez, Executive Secretary of the Euro-Arab Foundation of Grenade, Rostilav Ribakov, director of Orientalist Studies Institute at the Russian Academy of sciences.

The Conference proceedings closed up with issuing "The Paris Declaration on the Euro-Arab Dialogue of Cultures" in which participants expressed their worries about the rising phenomenon of fanaticism, terrorism and intolerance along with the increasing withdrawal into oneself and exclusion of others. They also stated that the best ways to cope with these phenomena is to set up healthy educational systems to initiate the rising generations in a human life devoid of any form of discrimination, stressing the role of media in this context.

Participants have also considered that the dialogue approach constitutes an appropriate way of bringing people closer, in a bid to further communication and mutual understanding and cooperation between peoples. Indeed, this will help reinforce common denominators between cultures and civilizations, while their rich diversity will help overcome excess and suspicion. That will set up the background for a universal human code of ethics that will dismiss all forms of domination, standardization, exclusion and marginalization.

Participants have also laid emphasis on the importance of the Euro-Arab dialogue with reference to its historical roots stressing the fact that this conference must be the starting point for a long-term process, which the Arab and European countries should support by stepping up meetings between intellectuals, setting up communication and cooperation channels, encouraging translation, exchanging educational missions and promoting the Arabic language in Europe.

Participants ended the declaration calling on the international community to take urgent practical measures to establish fair and global peace in the Middle East.

2- Conference on: "The Role of Media in the Arab-Western Intercultural Communication".

Being the most important factors to affect cultural relations negatively and positively, and because of the negative image of Arabs in the western media, including Europe, means of media were at the centre of conference entitled "The Role of Media in the Arab-Western Intercultural Communication" held by the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in collaboration with the World Islamic Society. The conference laid emphasis on the relation between the Arab and Western worlds, particularly Europe, at the level of media and the exchanged image between both parties.

The conference, which was held in Paris in March 2004, discussed two main topics on the agenda proceedings. The first dealt with an evaluation of the Arab and European journalists' status and the stereotyped image presented in both spaces, while the second focused on discussing a future strategy likely to put forward recommendations to promote the role of media towards an effective dialogue on equal basis between the Arab and European cultures.

The papers, which were presented within the first topic, attached importance to the image of Arabs and Islam in the western media and the biased description provided by these media, especially after the events of September 11, which engendered a flow of writings preaching conflicts.

Other researches dealt with the image of Western civilization in the Arab media, which themselves have not escaped the temptation of stereotyping and abusive simplification. Other Arab and European thinkers and journalists presented papers showing that being aware of the other is not dissociable from his being that he reflects. Hence the narrow interweaving of the Arab world and Europe.

As for the technical, cultural, economic and political obstacles which slow down the intercultural communication between the two spaces, the speakers laid emphasis on the

numerical deep gap which separates them, the difficulties inherent in the collective memory and the impact of certain current events in addition to cultural complexes inherited from ideologies.

On the second topic dealing with the prospects to instigate the role of media in promoting an intercultural Arab-Western dialogue, at the same time, complementary and equal, the conference adopted a series of recommendations. The main ones are:

- Studying the causes which led to the images and representations that they bear of each other, on the basis of scientific plans worked out by those in charge of communication and by thinkers from both parties.

- Instigating the technical and professional abilities of those working in the Arab media to enable them to fully assume their role in spreading information and reporting an objective image on the basis of dialogue and communication.

- Coordinating between the actors of Arab and European media spaces to help set up an Arab-western alliance which will achieve the values of tolerance, solidarity and peaceful coexistence, prevailing the right to difference as one of the basic rights of people and nations.

The views expressed in the conference might be a good background for the future work between ALECSO and its partners in Europe towards a better image of both Europeans and Arabs, a better acquaintance and therefore mutual understanding.

3- Conference on "The Leading Achievements in the Arab-Islamic Civilization"

To better popularize the Arab-Islamic civilization, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization convened, in collaboration with the World Islamic Society, a symposium, on 17-18 May 2005 at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, entitled "The Leading Achievements of the Arab-Islamic Civilization".

The symposium discussed the outstanding aspects of the various achievements of the Arab-Islamic civilization at the levels of philosophy, sciences, literature and aesthetics through papers presented by prominent Arab thinkers, researchers and professors. These include Doctor Salah Fadhl (Egypt), Doctor Abdelwahab Boudiba (Tunisia), Doctor Charbel Dagher (Lebanon), Doctor Omar Ettir (Jamahiriya of Libya), Mr Mustapha Kabbaj (Morocco), in addition to a number of Orient lists and thinkers from France (Gilbert Granguillaume) and Germany (Stefen Weinderan and Peter Ripken).

The main themes on the symposium agenda focused on the additions that many prominent Arab-Islamic figures have brought about to the universal civilization like Ibn Tufail and Ibn Khaldun, and world masterpieces such as "The Thousand and One Nights", as well as many leading educational institutions such as "Beit Al Hikma" and the University of "Almustansariya" in Baghdad.

The idea of holding the symposium was born starting from a book entitled "Splendors of the Arab-Islamic Civilization" published by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization and the World Islamic Society, in Arabic and German on the occasion of Arab world's participation as a guest of honor in Frankfurt book fair in 2004.

The symposium helped evaluate the different aspects of the Arab-Islamic achievements throughout history in the fields of sciences, arts, knowledge and creation, stressing their contribution to the universal civilization.

4- Dialogue with Eastern Europe: Arabic and Arab-Islamic civilization have bridged the gap

Within the strategy of dialogue with Europe, the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization extended its cultural relations to countries lying to east of Europe. The prevailing linker in this relation is particularly teaching the Arabic language and the Arab-Islamic civilization in a region which used to have old links with the Arab-Islamic world thanks to the geographical dialogue or thanks to history, or both of them.

ALECSO has taken a number of initiatives to strengthen cultural relations and cooperation between the Arab world and Eastern Europe. They have included holding symposiums, signing agreements, exchanging visits and taking part in cultural, educational and scientific events.

- The meeting of teachers of Arabic and Arab-Islamic civilization in Eastern Europe, which was held by the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in Bucharest, Rumania (from 14 to 16 February 2002), remains the most important feature of the Organization's action in Eastern Europe.

The meeting has set up a number of aims. These include strengthening the channels of cultural dialogue between the Arab world and the other nations, having relations and exchanging experiences between institutions in charge of teaching Arabic in eastern European universities and institutes, and studying the reality of teaching Arabic to non-native speakers outside the Arab world.

Participants in the meeting included from Europe professors from Bucharest University, Rumania, Belgrade University, Yugoslavia, Urasu University, Poland and Sofia University, Bulgaria. Participants from the Arab world included ALECSO's representative, professors from the American University in Cairo, the University of Tunis and the University of Damascus. The scientific sessions have also been followed by a big number of people specializing in Arab studies from the University of Bucharest. Participants in meeting sessions have raised a number of problems dealing with teaching Arabic and the Arab-Islamic culture in Eastern European universities to which Arab participants have provided replies.

The meeting ended up with a number of recommendations. Participants have called universities, national and regional scientific and teaching bodies, particularly the Arab League, ALECSO and ISESCO to make more efforts to encourage learning Arabic in middle and Eastern Europe to publicize the Arabo-Islamic culture in these areas.

Participants have also laid emphasis on the importance of educational aids in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers and keeping up with new approaches in teaching foreign languages. Similarly, they attached importance to translation in the field of learning on the one hand, and to better publicize the Arab culture, on the other hand.

They have called the Arab League Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to hold symposiums specializing in matters of translation and set up a work plan, set up translation projects and carry them out. They also stressed the need to provide libraries and research centres in countries of Middle and Eastern Europe with Arab resources, references, periodicals and newspapers.

The Arab participants showed satisfaction as regards the interest in the Arabic language in the countries of Middle and Eastern Europe, and the excellent level of learners of Arabic and students graduating from Arabic departments in these countries and their wish to deepen their studies.

- On the occasion of celebrating the 30th anniversary of founding the Arab studies department at the University of Sofia, Bulgaria, a cooperation agreement between the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization and the University of Sofia was signed, being another aspect of the cultural dialogue between the Arab world and Eastern Europe.

The agreement stressed the need to exchange information, publications and documents between both parties, organize common events, particularly as regards the teaching of Arabic and the Arab-Islamic civilization in the Arab studies department at the University of Sofia and support this department so that it plays a leading role in dialogue between Bulgaria and the Arab world and bridges the gap between Arab and Bulgarian researchers. On this occasion, Doctor Mongi Bousnina, ALECSO's Director General, took part in the scientific symposium entitled "The Arab World and Islam: Identities and Cultural Interactions" held by the University of Sofia, and presented a conference on the background for a real dialogue of cultures from ALECSO's point of view.

There is hope from both the Bulgarian and Arab parties that this cooperation agreement between ALECSO and the University of Sofia will give impetus to the Arab studies department in this university and to the Arab-Bulgarian dialogue in general.

- By taking part in a number of symposiums on the dialogue of cultures in some Eastern European countries, ALECSO is attempting to establish a channel for future cultural dialogue between the Arab world and these countries.

Similarly, on the occasion of holding the regional symposium (South-Eastern Europe), jointly organized by UESCO the Republic of Macedonia, in Oharid, Macedonia, on 29-30 August 2003, on the dialogue of cultures, Doctor Mongi Bousnina, the ALECSO's Director General presented a paper about the Arab view on the issues of dialogue of cultures and cultural diversity.

In the same context, ALECSO's Director General took part in a symposium entitled "International Conference on the Dialogue of Cultures: Towards a New Engagement of Europe" called for by the International Academy on Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations in Warsaw, Poland from 17 to 19 June 2004.

The symposiums and meetings organized in Eastern Europe open up for both Arabs and this part of Europe opportunities of dialogue and cultural exchange which have to be backed up in the coming years.

5- The Arab-German Dialogue: From Frankfurt to Berlin

Thanks to the deep interaction between the Arab and German cultures and the sound relations bridged by German orientalists between the Arab-Islamic civilization and students of the German language, the project of the Arab-German cultural dialogue has always been present in ALECSO's plans as regards the dialogue of cultures.

The participation of the Arab world, as the guest of honor, in Frankfurt book fair in October 2004 has pushed forward the dialogue. Arabs have entered the book fair through the gate of the cultural dialogue, looking forward to communicating with the whole world and in particular with the German to help them better know the leading achievements of the Arab-Islamic civilizations, and inviting them to find out about their creations in the different fields of arts and culture.

This was a good opportunity to hold a small symposium in the fair space about "Dialogue of Arab-German cultures and the Role of Orientalism". This has been an introduction to a deeper and larger dialogue between both cultures that the Organization is preparing to hold in 2005 in Berlin in collaboration with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and German institutions.

From Frankfurt to Berlin, the Arab-German dialogue has made many steps towards implementation and achievement. It is another step in the Euro-Arab dialogue which ALECSO has been setting up in collaboration with other European parts and countries.

The Arab-German dialogue has given birth to cooperation between the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization and "Frederick Ebert" German Institution which has supported the Arab participation Frankfurt book fair in October 2004. It has been a first step towards future cooperation between ALECSO and "Frederick Ebert" institution on the Arab-German dialogue.

6- The National Commission Euro-Arab Dialogue: Education towards Learning to Live Together

The National Commissions for education, culture and sciences on Euro-Arab dialogue started on the joint initiative of the Tunisian and German UNESCO commissions during the 46th session of the international conference of education held in Geneva in September 2000.

Accordingly, a Task Force was set up including representatives of Arab and European national commissions who were joined, later, by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALECSO), UNESCO and the Islamic, Educational Scientific and cultural Organization (ISESCO).

The Group's main objective is to bring the civil society institutions and all social forces to give a fresh impetus to UNESCO programmes in the educational, cultural, scientific and communications fields. This will be achieved through setting up cooperation mechanisms at National Commissions level in the Arab and European regions and holding joint events in the Arab and European spaces to better know each other and help launch dialogue particularly by means of education.

Consistent with its firm belief in the importance of the educational, cultural, scientific and civilizational dimensions of Euro-Arab dialogue, ALECSO has closely followed, and played an active part in the Group's action from a very early stage, on the occasion of the 31st General Conference of UNESCO in October 2001.

The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization took part in the Group's first meeting which was held in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates from 9 to 13 April 2002 and presented its views as for the dialogue of cultures and put forward recommendations to promote the Euro-Arab dialogue.

ALECSO was also present at the meeting of the Task Force held in the European Council's headquarters in Strasbourg, France from 27 to 30 October 2002. ALECSO expressed its willingness to set up interactive partnership with similar regional and international organizations mainly UNESCO and the Council of Europe, and bring views together to achieve the common objectives and get the Arab and European spaces closer through cultural partnership.

Being a member of the Task Force, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization also attended the international conference entitled "Learning To Live Together: Which Education? For which Citizenship?" hosted by Rabat, Morocco from 10 to 14 March 2003 on the initiative of Moroccan and French National Commissions, and presented a paper including its views as regards "learning to live together".

The meeting proceedings closed up with a number of tangible results including, mainly, an agreement on a global strategy which will serve as a framework for cooperation between the Group's members including National commissions and international and regional organizations.

The 12th meeting of the National Commissions for education, culture and sciences was an opportunity for the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization to call for a meeting of the Euro-Arab dialogue Task force from 18 to 19 June 2003 in Cairo.

The meeting proceedings laid emphasis on preparing for a real start of joint projects adopted by the Task force. ALECSO has submitted two papers; the first was about the recommended programmes and strategies as regards dialogue of cultures while the second dealt with teaching Arabic in the European space.

ALECSO participated, as well, in the conference about the dialogue of cultures and cultural diversity in knowledge societies, convened by the Tunisian and French National Commissions in May 2005 in Tunis. The Organization has submitted two papers; one of them was presented by the Director General in which he stated ALECSO's views about the Euro-Arab dialogue and its prospects to achieve "Living Together" among two neighboring spaces having several common features.

The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization has taken part in many other meetings of the Euro-Arab dialogue Task Force. The first took place in June 2004 in Sana'a, Yemen on the occasion of the UNESCO Arab National Commissions' meetings; the second was held in September 2002 in Geneva on the occasion of the 47th

International Conference for Education, while the third was a preliminary meeting in May 2003 in Tripoli, Jamahiriya of Libya to prepare for the Cairo meeting mentioned previously.

The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization is still backing up the Task Force works on the Euro-Arab dialogue in collaboration with other international and regional organizations.

7- Cooperation between ALECSO and the Council of Europe

Cooperation between the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization and the Council of Europe reflects a deep conviction from both parties of the need to set up a cultural dialogue between the Arab world and Europe for a better unbiased knowledge of the other, respecting cultural diversity.

The world changes and the challenges which the educational and cultural policies in Europe and in the Arab world are confronted with, have reinforced this will of cooperation between ALECSO and the Council of Europe, particularly that both institutions are committed to lay a background for cooperation and Euro-Arab dialogue as regards learning to live together, an initiative taken in 2001 by the National Commissions for education, culture and sciences in nine Arab countries and nine European countries.

Since then, visits and relations between officials of ALECSO and the Council of Europe have been reinforced, looking forward to having a diversified and global partnership and serving peace and mutual understanding and knowledge.

Accordingly, ALECSO has taken part in the works of the European Council's Higher Education Commission, held from 9 to 10 October 2003 in Strasbourg, France. At the close of the meeting, ALECSO was invited to take part in the Commission's meetings as an observer, while the Council of Europe will receive similar treatment in ALECSO's meetings.

Later, the Director General sent a letter to the conference of European ministers of culture, held by the Council of Europe from 20 to 22 October 2003 in Opatia, Croatia, in which he stated the Arab world's conviction of the importance of dialogue with Europe and the need for cooperation towards a culture of peace based on mutual respect.

Replying to the European Council's invitation, the ALECSO's Director General took part in the 21st Conference of the European Ministers of education entitled "Bicultural Education: Managing Diversity and Promoting Democracy", which was held from 10 to 12 November 2003 in Athens, Greece.

In his speech delivered in the conference, the Director General explained the Arabs' views as regards the role of education in promoting cultural diversity and dialogue of cultures. He also stated the joint programmes that ALECSO is going to carry out in collaboration with the Council of Europe in the field of education.

Similarly, at the invitation of the Council of Europe, the ALECSO's Educational Head Department paid a working visit to the European Council's headquarters in Strasbourg, France from 14 to 17 November 2003 to discuss the projects and programmes to be achieved within the framework of cooperation between ALECSO and the Council of Europe.

To carry out cooperation between the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization and the Council of Europe, ALECSO took part in holding a conference on "Integrating Information and Communication Technologies in the Educational System", hosted by Alexandria from 17 to 18 December 2003. The

Organization's delegation contributed to the conference works by presenting four papers and submitting a number of recommendations as regards cooperation with the Council of Europe. Accordingly, the European Council's representatives have shown interest in these recommendations and suggested holding a meeting for further discussion.

The visit paid by ALECSO's Director General, heading a delegation, to the European Council's headquarters in Strasbourg, France on March 19, 2004 was an opportunity to set up a background for cooperation between ALECSO and the Council in the fields of education, culture, heritage and youth based on the dialogue of cultures.

In the field of education, the future projects should revolve about particularly a better knowledge of the other and the dialogue of cultures through educational institutions. To that end the agreement is considering a project to teach citizenship and intercultural dialogue, and another on language teaching for a better knowledge of the other, while the third will deal with conducting a comparative analysis about the image of the other in school textbooks in the subject of history.

In the field of culture and communications, priority has been given to dialogue of cultures and cultural diversity through multidimensional projects.

These will enable to have a better knowledge of the Arab culture by loading Internet with translations of cultural contents introducing information on Arabs' culture and its contribution to universal civilization.

As for the protection of the Arab cultural heritage, ALECSO and the Council of Europe are looking forward to cooperating to hold workshops and training sessions to preserve the Arab-Islamic heritage.

Talks between both parties is going on to implement joint programmes which are to be carried out in 2005 and 2006, opening up a new page of cooperation between Arabs and Europe.

ARAB-IBERIAN AMERICAN INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE:

JOINT CONTRIBUTIONS AND MUTUAL INFLUENCE

1. Arab-Iberian American intercultural dialogue stems from the common roots of the two spaces. These were wrought by centuries of history and embodied in the Arab-Islamic presence first in the Iberian Peninsula and then in South America. It also springs from the age-old, rich pluralism of the Arab and Iberian American cultures. Many different peoples have in turn contributed to, and drawn on these cultures. Arab-Islamic culture had indeed drawn from the wellsprings of knowledge and wisdom wherever they were, whether in Greece, Persia, or India. In its turn, it then shone on the world, from the furthest reaches of Asia to Western Europe. It created a space whose unity did not preclude diversity or specificity.

Similarly, the Iberian American culture stems from pluralism and a mixture of diverse, Indian, European, African, and Arab origins. This makes Latin America, in the words of the famous Mexican writer Octavio Paz, "one of the most important loci of the dialogue of cultures."

In coming together with the Iberian American space, the Arab world is actuated by emotional motivations. That space has indeed a special place in the minds and hearts of Arabs. Andalusia forms an integral part of the history and emotional life of Arabs. What is more, it is a source of pride for them. Indeed, it materializes brilliant achievements of Arab-Islamic civilization, at a time when it was flourishing, and reached its intellectual and artistic zenith.

As a continuation of Andalusia, Latin America remained close to the hearts of Arabs, and present in their emotional life. Andalusians, who had come to the southern part of the new continent within the throngs of Spanish emigrants, left their marks on the towns and villages where they settled. This is a not inconsiderable influence. Numerous studies have shown that Andalusians represented 39% of the total number of Spanish emigrants to Latin America between the fifteenth and seventeenth century AD. They brought along their cultural standards, and intellectual and civilizational heritage. Traces of this can be found in what is known as domestic art, embodied in architecture for the most part, but also in numerous artefacts all over South America.

Historical events have thus linked the Arab world and the Iberian American space in a way that makes up for their geographic separation. From the Andalusians to the latest waves of Arab emigrants to Latin America in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, relations between the two communities increasingly strengthened. There appeared many areas of mutual influence between them. In these literature had a privileged position.

The influence of Arab culture in Latin American literature is clear, as shown in the works of the Brazilian Jorge Amadou, the Mexican Carlos Fuentes, and the Paraguayan poet Miguel Angel Fernandez Arguello, author of the famous poem on Andalusia, the

Argentine Jorge Luis Borges, author of the famous play *Arabian Nights*, not to mention men of letters of Arab origin, such as the Chilean Benedito Chuaqui, and the Argentine Juan Yaser, author of fiery poems on Palestine.

Similarly, on the Arab literary scene, people take great interest in, and are quite keen on, Latin American literature. There are Arabic translations of the works of Marquez, Borges, and Fuentes, for which there is a growing, lively, and interactive Arab reading public. Undoubtedly, this is proof that Arabs and South Americans have common emotional ground.

Literature is the locus of just one aspect of the mutual influence between the Arab and Iberian American spaces. Many studies, carried out by Iberian Americans and Arabs alike, have shown other aspects of this inter-cultural influence in the areas of art, architecture, and ways of life. The object of these studies was the Arab presence in the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America, and the Arab contribution to Latin American culture. This fertile ground provides a wealth of material for dialogue between the Arab and Latin American spaces.

Arab communities in Latin America provide another bridge for dialogue. Whether or not they plan it, they enrich the cultures of Mexico, Argentina, Ecuador, Columbia, Chile, and other countries in the Iberian American space. They also make an effective contribution to all areas of life, whether in politics, the economy, the arts, or literature. Members of Arab communities have reached prominent positions in the societies that have adopted them.

The Arab and Iberian American spaces have common present concerns, and share forward-looking aspirations. Indeed, they belong to geopolitical zones with very similar conditions. They face the same challenges arising from the new international situation at the dawn of the 21st century.

2. For these reasons, dialogue with the Iberian American space was a strategic priority for ALECSO. Two working papers paved the way for it. They were presented at the "**International Symposium on Dialogue between the Arab and Other Cultures**" convened by ALECSO in Tunis from 20-21 November 1997. The first paper, presented by the Arab party, dealt with dialogue between the Arab world and Latin America. The second, presented by the Iberian American side, tackled the subject of the Arab presence in Chilean literature.

3. A real, extensive study of the subject of dialogue between Arab culture and the Iberian American space was carried out at a major international symposium. Its theme was "**Arab-Iberian American Intercultural Dialogue: Joint Contributions and Mutual Influence.**" Convened by ALECSO, it took place in Tunis from 10-12 December 2002.

The symposium was the first Arab initiative for strengthening relations of exchange and dialogue between the Arab and the Luso-Hispanic spaces in Europe and Latin America. It studied the effects of international changes in strategy and thought on the

common cultural bases of the two groups. It also examined the contribution of the Arab and Iberian American cultures to the construction of universal human values, and the role of Arab communities in bringing the two spaces closer together.

Eminent intellectual and political figures from Europe, the Iberian American space, and the Arab world attended the symposium. They included Messrs Jeronimo Paez, Director of the "El Legado Andalusi" Foundation, sponsored by the King of Spain, Francisco Piñon, Secretary General of the Organization of Iberian American States for Education, Science and Culture, Julio Magalhães, Director of the Portuguese Institute of Arab-Islamic Culture. Also attended the symposium Mrs Aziza Bennani, President of the Executive Council of UNESCO, and academic specialist in Hispanic literatures and cultures, and Leonora Esguerra, representative of the General Secretariat for Iberian American Cooperation, Messrs Paul Balta, the famous media person and president of the Euro-Mediterranean Forum of Cultures (France), Mohamed Larbi M'sari, former Moroccan Minister of Communications, ISESCO representative, and Abdelwadoud Ould Abdallah El Hachem, former Mauritanian minister.

A number of Arab intellectuals and creative artists were also present. These included Mr Samir Sarhane, Director of the Egyptian National Book Trade Foundation, and Dr. Salah Fadhl, Director of the Egyptian Library and Records Office, Abdelwaheb Bouhdiba, president of the Tunisian Academy of Science, Literature and Arts (Beit El Hikma), Dr. Mohamed Hassine Fantar, holder of President Be Ali's chair in dialogue among civilisations and religions, the Emirati poetess Dhabia Khamis, and a number of academics and researchers.

Proceedings of the symposium fell into four main themes:

- Dialogue among cultures: theoretical foundations and specific approaches
- The general framework for Arab-Iberian American dialogue
- Specifics of Arab-Iberian American intercultural dialogue: historical and civilizational bases and literary and artistic introductions
- Arab communities in Latin America: their cultural contribution and role in providing bridges for dialogue

Having heard over forty papers on these subjects, the symposium adopted at the end of its proceedings a number of recommendations. These advocated support for further dialogue and cultural relations between the Arab and Iberian American spaces. At structural level, it was envisaged to set up a permanent scientific committee co-sponsored by ALECSO and the Organization of Iberian American States for Education, Science, and Culture. It was also recommended to create two associations, one for Arab specialists in Iberian American studies, and one for Iberian Americans with an interest in Arab-Islamic studies.

At educational level, it was recommended to promote the teaching of Arabic in the Iberian American countries, and Spanish and Portuguese in the Arab countries. It was also recommended to include a number of scientific terms in the school curricula and textbooks of both parties to the dialogue. These will provide information on the civilization, cultural life, geography, and history of both spaces. It was also envisaged to

create chairs in Arab-Islamic culture in Iberian American universities and Iberian American culture in Arab universities.

It was proposed that a number of books by Latin American authors of Arab origin be translated into Arabic. Similarly, a selection of Arabic literary works would be translated into Spanish and Portuguese. Participants agreed to hold meetings on Arab-Iberian American dialogue on a regular basis. These will take place every other year and be hosted in turn by the Arab and Iberian American spaces (see text of the full report).

4. At the level of relations between the Arab world and the Iberian American space the symposium resulted in strengthening the bonds uniting the two organizations that represent them, **ALECSO and the Organization of Iberian American States for Education, Science, and Culture (OEI)**. At the meeting of "The Three Linguistic Spaces," held in Rome on 28 November 2003, the two organizations signed a **framework cooperation agreement**. This stipulated in particular that the two parties will exchange information, documents, and expertise, and carry out joint projects in the fields of education, culture, and science. It also advocated pursuing dialogue between the Arab world and the Iberian American space. The latter would host the next stage of this dialogue. Both organizations and other parties in Spain and Portugal are currently working to achieve this objective.

5. The Tunis symposium opened up new prospects for ALECSO to translate into fact Arab-Iberian American dialogue in projects and activities, as recommended by the symposium. In this respect, it is worth mentioning the **two agreements signed by ALECSO in May 2005, one with the European Institute of the Mediterranean in Barcelona, and the other with the "El legado Andalusi" (Andalusian Legacy) Foundation in Granada**. Each projects to hold intellectual and artistic events in either space. This would help establish links between Arab and Iberian American intellectuals and creative artists as a first step towards wider and more comprehensive dialogue.

The agreement between ALECSO and the European Institute of the Mediterranean provides for setting up relations of cooperation and partnership between the two parties on different issues related to education, culture, and science. For this purpose, it is envisaged that the two parties hold continuous consultations with each other, and exchange information, and documents about these subjects, and that each party will send representatives to conferences and symposia organized by the other. This also involves carrying out joint activities in areas relevant to the agreement.

The agreement between ALECSO and the "El Legado Andalusi" Foundation provides in particular that the two parties translate and disseminate each other's publications. It also provides for the exchange of information and databases about Spain and the Arab and Iberian American countries, and for traveling exhibitions on Arab culture and civilization in Spain, an in the Iberian American and Arab countries. In addition, it envisages cultural and scientific activities highlighting aspects of Arab artistic creation -in music, film-making, drama, etc. - in Spain and in the Arab and

Iberian American countries. It also plans to hold study days on the Arab and Iberian American cultural and scientific heritage.

In this context, it was agreed that the "El Legado Andalusi" Foundation translate the book Landmarks of Arab-Islamic Civilization into Spanish. This book had been jointly published by ALECSO and the World Islamic call Society in Arabic and German when the Arab world was guest of honor at the 2004 Frankfurt Book Fair.

It was also agreed that ALECSO participate in the big event to be held by the "El Legado Andalusi" Foundation in 2006 under the aegis of King Juan Carlos of Spain, on the influence of Arab culture in the Mediterranean basin during the middle Ages. On the sidelines of this event, the "El Legado Andalusi" Foundation will commemorate the 600th anniversary of the death of the Arab scholar Ibn Khaldun.

The "El Legado Andalusi" Foundation, whose honorary president is King Juan Carlos, of Spain, aims at reviving and making known the Spanish Andalusian legacy, particularly in the Islamic period. It lays emphasis on the mutual influences of the Mediterranean environment that begat this legacy over the ages.

In addition to these two agreements, new prospects have opened up, of cooperation and dialogue with Spain, and through Spain, with the entire Iberian American space. This was through the following mechanisms and institutions and what possible projects were jointly planned with them:

- **The Municipality of Barcelona:** will hold symposia and conferences on dialogue among civilisations, and organize art exhibitions.
- **The Barcelona National Museum:** this space can be used for Arab cultural events
- **The Municipality of Seville:** ALECSO will participate in the first meeting of Arab, European, and Latin American cities to be convened by the Municipality of Seville in 2006.
- **The Alhambra Palace (Granada):** This historical site can be used for Arab cultural activities (musical, intellectual, architectural, poetic, etc.).

Arab-Russian Dialogue: The Interaction of Two Civilisations and a Long History of Bilateral Relations

1- The Arab-Russian dialogue initiated by the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization and the Oriental Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow, is based on long-standing historical relations between the Arab and Russian cultures. These relations have been positive and privileged for ages. They date back from the time when Arab explorers discovered the peoples of that region, and reported on their lives, from the beginning of the eighth century ad to the contemporary era, when they were enhanced by an awareness of common interests. These relations were reinforced by the positive role played by Russian orientalists who publicized Arab-Islamic culture, and gave a positive picture of it to readers in Russia and the former Soviet Union. Similarly, a group of Arab intellectuals translated Russian masterpieces into Arabic, and gave for Arab audiences the opportunity to know the poetry, novels, and music of leading Russian figures such as Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Pushkin, and Tchaikovsky.

These relations did not only concern culture and heritage; they were also political and developed rapidly in the second half of the last century. At the time Russia had taken praise-worthy positions in international organizations and at popular level in support of liberation movements in the Arab world and the Palestinian cause. Because cultures provide bridges for politics, and preserve, develop, and reinforce relations, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization thinks that cultural dialogue between the Arab and Russian cultures will make a major contribution to promoting and pursuing these relations.

2- Dialogue initiatives started with the signing of **a memorandum of agreement between ALECSO and the Moscow-based Oriental Institute of the Russian Academy of Science** on 9 May 2001 in Tunis. The agreement provided for cooperation between the two parties in many areas. These include: exhibitions to publicize the Arab and Russian civilizations, conferences to promote dialogue, training sessions for Arabic teachers in Russia, and the exchange of information, visits, manuscripts, research work, and experience between ALECSO and the Oriental Institute in Moscow.

3- To supplement the memorandum, **an executive program was signed** in October 2002 in Moscow providing that starting from 2003 regular international conferences on "Arab-Russian Dialogue in the Twenty-first Century" would be held in Russia and the Arab countries, and attended by prominent scholars and intellectuals. The first conference, on "Interaction between the Arab and Russian Civilizations and the History of Bilateral Relations" was scheduled in June 2002 in Tunisia.

4- To implement the latter, the Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization held **the first symposium on Arab-Russian dialogue in the twenty-first century** in Hammamet, Tunisia, on 23-25 June, 2003. The symposium, on the theme of "Interaction between the Two Civilizations and the History of their Bilateral Relations," discussed the historical background to Arab-Russian relations, the role of orientalists in bringing the two cultures closer, and the bilateral effects of these relations. It also sketched in the features and future prospects of Arab-Russian dialogue through about thirty papers presented by leading Arab and Russian scholars and intellectuals.

A number of Russian scholars, from the Oriental Studies Institute at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Moscow and St Petersburg, took part in the symposium, including Doctor Anatoly Egorin, the institute's Deputy Director, and academics from the Russian Federation's Institute of African and Asian studies including Doctor Dimitri Frolov, Chair of the Arabic Literature Department in this institute, Doctor Marina Vidisova, Chair of the Political Science Department, Doctor Leonid Seokianin, professor at the Law School, Russian Academy of Science, and Doctor Galena Mirononva, professor at the Foreign Language Department, University of Moscow.

The symposium was also attended by Arab intellectuals, researchers, and creative artists from Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria, Sudan Syria, Palestine, Kuwait, Lebanon, Egypt, and Morocco, and delegates from the Union of Arab Writers. Arab participants included Doctor Samir Sarhan, President of the Egyptian General Body of Writers, Doctor Taj Essir El hassan, professor at Omdurman University, Sudan, Doctor Ali Halabi, adviser to the Higher Education Minister in Kuwait, Doctor Wajih Fanus, Deputy Secretary General of the Union of Lebanese Writers, Doctor Maria Taoufik, professor of Russian at the Mohamed El Khamis University in Rabat, Morocco, and the Tunisian writer Mustapha El Farsi...

The symposium's proceedings consisted in eight sessions on the following four themes:

- The historical background to Arab-Russian relations.
- The role of Russian orientalism in bringing the Arab and Russian cultures closer.
- Bilateral effects on the Arab and Russian Cultures.
- Features and prospects of Arab-Russian dialogue.

The papers presented by Russian and Arab participants focused on the nature of historical relations between the Arab and Russian cultures and the role played by Islam in Russia, in which nine states have majority Muslim populations. The Russian orientalists laid special emphasis on the specificity of Russian culture, and its links with the East, and stressed that Russia had always been open to eastern values.

Throughout history, Arabs had helped open schools and teach the Koran to the extent that Tatars started traveling to Arab schools in Baghdad, Basra, and Kufa to be instructed in theology and military techniques, as many of the Arab students are doing for other subjects in Russian universities and institutes today. Russian communities in Egypt and Tunisia in the 1920's are good examples of the long-standing, historical Arab-Russian relations. Russians, at the time, played a part in the economies of the countries

where they lived, influenced their spiritual life through Russian schools, libraries, clubs, and the Orthodox Church.

On the other hand, Russians have shown an interest in the different experiences of Russia and the Arab countries through comparative studies about the Russian and Arab legal systems, compared a number of Arab political experiences to Russian radicalism at the beginning of the last century. All participants stressed the need to promote economic and cultural relations between Russia and the Arab countries, to help set up a new pole in the world, which would include Russia and the Arab countries, to cope with globalization.

At the close of the symposium, participants adopted a number of recommendations to promote Arab-Russian cultural relations. These comprise strengthening scientific relations, promoting the exchange of students and teachers, and encouraging the latter to include more information about the history of the other party's countries in their respective school curricula. Participants also recommended giving fresh impetus to two-way translation of scientific works into Russian and Arabic, and improving communication channels between the two parties through setting up a website to provide information on Arab-Russian cultural relations.

Their recommendations also laid emphasis on setting up Arab or Russian cultural centres and libraries in both regions, and creating or supporting associations of the alumni of Russian universities. Participants stressed the need for regular meetings on Arab-Russian dialogue every two years.

5- In line with this symposium, **a cooperation agreement was signed between ALECSO and Kazan University, Tatarstan**, in November 2004 in the presence of Doctor Mongi Bousnina, General Director of ALECSO, on the occasion of the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the university. The agreement provides for holding symposiums and conferences to promote dialogue between the two parties, organizing joint exhibitions to publicize values common to Russians and Arabs. It also envisages arranging meetings between scientists and experts from both parties, cooperating on Arab manuscripts in Russia, promoting cooperation with Russian specialists in Arabic studies, and helping Kazan university train students of Arabic to promote cooperation and develop relations between both parties.

6- Cooperation between ALECSO and the Institute of Oriental Studies at The Russian Academy of Sciences continued with **the signing in November 2004 of an executive program the two institutions**. This provides for:

- Preparing the second symposium on Arab-Russian dialogue.
- Organizing a workshop on realities and prospects of Arab-Islamic studies in European universities.
- Holding a training session for Russian teachers of Arabic.
- Carrying on the exchange of publications and information between the two parties.

- Pursuing consultations on setting up a centre for Arab-Russian dialogue involving all parties (universities, centres of oriental studies, research centres). It is envisaged that the centre will define strategies for cooperation in science, culture, and education between Russia and the Arab world, and hold joint meetings of experts, intellectual, and politicians from the two parties.

7- In the light of this executive program, the Arab and Russian parties have strengthened their relations to achieve the following steps:

- Holding the second symposium on Arab-Russian dialogue.
- Encouraging cooperation in different fields (teaching of Arabic, translation, exchange of publications...) between ALECSO and the Centre for Arab-Russian Dialogue which was set up in Russia in March 2005 and whose main activity is to supervise Arab-Islamic studies, the teaching of Arabic in Russia, two-way translation from Arabic and Russian, and the exchange publications between Russia and the Arab world.
- ALECSO's contribution to the Arab-Islamic encyclopedia being prepared by the Institute of Oriental Studies in Moscow publicize the main features Arab-Islamic civilization.

DIALOGUE WITH WORLD

LINGUISTIC SPACES

In its publications, ALECSO considers dialogue among languages as one of the most important components of dialogue among cultures. The defense of linguistic pluralism is a defense of cultural pluralism, and different world views. This also means upholding diverse ways of envisaging dialogue with the other and creative patterns, which, together, make up the great course of human progress.

For this reason, in its dialogues with other cultures, ALECSO has opened up to linguistic spaces extending over large areas in the world.

1. Dialogue with "the Three Linguistic Spaces"

Since 2003, ALECSO has followed the progress of the "Three Linguistic Spaces" in their action to establish the principle of cultural diversity in today's world and defending it against the threats of cultural globalisation, and the hegemonic trends of unilateralist cultures.

This cooperation started with the participation of ALECSO, represented by Dr Mongi Bousnina, its Director General, in the proceedings of the symposium on "the Three Linguistic Spaces," held in Mexico City, from 2-4 April 2003, whose motto was "Cooperation, Diversity, and Peace." A major result of this symposium was "**the Mexico City Declaration on Cultural Diversity.**" ALECSO signed this declaration, alongside UNESCO, the Council of Europe, the International Organization of French-Speaking Countries (OIF), the Organization of Iberian American States for Education, Science, and Culture, and the Latin Union.

The declaration affirmed the signatories' belief in the importance of cultural and linguistic diversity, and of expressions of cultural identity in embodying this diversity. The Declaration also asserted the need for dialogue among cultures as a basis for peace and peaceful coexistence between peoples. The signatories also agreed on a range of views to implement these principles, including an international Convention on Cultural Diversity.

At the invitation of the Latin Union, ALECSO actively participated in the meeting of the "Three Linguistic Spaces", on 28 November 2003 in Rome. The meeting was devoted to two main subjects: challenges to cultural diversity in the different linguistic and cultural spaces, and preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society.

ALECSO also participated in the symposium convened by the "Three Linguistic Spaces" on 23 August 2004 in Barcelona, Spain, on the theme of "The New Geo-cultural Spaces and Globalisation." This was in the context of the international forum "Barcelona 2004," co-organized by the government of Spain, the government of the Catalonia region, and the Municipality of Barcelona, in cooperation with a number of cultural institutions, and international and regional organizations.

Participation in these three events enabled the Arab world to make its voice heard by other cultural and linguistic spaces in the world. Through ALECSO, this permitted to make known the Arab viewpoint on cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, and cultural and linguistic pluralism. The main ideas expressed by ALECSO on these three occasions can be summed up as follows:

- Cultural diversity is a permanent trait of Arab culture, which abounds with the contributions of the different Arab countries. This diversity rests on the considerable local variety that goes into the making of a unified Arab culture.
- All cultures derive mutual benefits from cultural diversity, which makes a significant contribution to their capacities, humanity, and creativity.
- The Arab world has chosen to defend its culture, but avoid cutting itself off from the world under the pretext of preserving its identity. It believes that it is impossible to fight globalisation by shutting oneself from the world.
- Every country in the world has a legitimate right to cultural exception, for it is morally unacceptable to deprive peoples of what makes up their soul, their emotional life, and their roots.
- The defense of linguistic pluralism is a defense of cultural pluralism, different perspectives on the world, and different ways of envisaging dialogue with the other. This also means upholding creative patterns, which, together, make up the great course of human progress.
- There is need to make Arab-Islamic culture better known to other cultural spaces and to remedy the misrepresentation of its core content by certain foreign media and circles.
- It is important to educate people about the concept of "Living together", and materialize this concern in educational systems, consistent with the necessary dialogue with the other. To achieve this, it is necessary to give the right picture of religions, promote foreign language teaching, and alter the humanities curriculum? i.e. the history, geography, and civic education courses included in it? to root out legacies of prejudice against the other.
- For thousands of years Arab culture has had a natural readiness for dialogue with the other. Indeed, in both essence and history, it has a synthesizing character, and is the product of exchange and dialogue among several diverse cultures. For this reason, beyond the sad reality of current burning issues, by calling for dialogue, Arab culture asserts the vocation of a multi-racial people that has always found the way to give to others while gaining in richness, and take from others without impairing its authenticity.
- ALECSO is willing to play an active part in laying the foundations of, and promoting, a new approach to cultural and linguistic pluralism based on tolerance, and respect for cultural diversity and identity. It is willing to contribute effectively to the project of strategic alliances for multilateral cooperation covering all the areas of global human relations.

2. Dialogue with the Francophone Space

ALECSO cooperated with the francophone space, represented by the International Organization of French-Speaking Countries (OIF), based on many considerations, mainly the following:

- ALECSO shares the ambition of the Francophone grouping and its aspiration to dialogue with the other, and contact with the different linguistic and cultural spaces. This is irrespective of the fact that the French language is an expression of cultural diversity for both its permanent and occasional users the world over, from France to Canada, Belgium, Romania, Africa, and Asia. In addition, for historical reasons, a number of Arab countries have gone on teaching French, a language with a worldwide audience, and great cultural heritage.
- In its dialogue with the Francophone space, ALECSO is in fact dealing with a community that represents a quarter of the world's countries, 10 to 12% of the world's wealth, 18% of international trade, 20 to 25% of the world's tourism, 11% of the world's population, i.e. around 500 million people. This gives considerable weight to this space, and shows the importance of cooperating with it in the context of an even-handed dialogue among cultures and languages.
- The French language, in the countries that use it exclusively or partially, by positively coexisting with no less than two thousand local languages, demonstrates its capacity for coexistence and interaction with the other within the framework of respect for cultural diversity and difference of language.
- The Arabic language can make an effective contribution to linguistic and cultural dialogue, and, through partnership with the International Organization of French-Speaking Countries (OIF), provide a bridge between two spaces that should come closer together. This is consistent with its historical part in transferring science and knowledge from the Arab countries to Europe.

Consistent with these beliefs, ALECSO signed a framework cooperation agreement with the International Organization of French-Speaking Countries (OIF) on 20 December 2001 in Tunis. This agreement mainly provides for the exchange of information, representatives, and consultations between the two organizations, and for drawing up and implementing joint projects in the interest of dialogue between the Arab and Francophone spaces.

Since translation is one of the best means of dialogue, ALECSO joined with the Intergovernmental Francophone Agency (the operating agency of the International Organization of French-Speaking Countries) for a permanent programme for translating a number of French books into Arabic, and a number of Arabic ones into French. The operation covers the educational field, but may subsequently extend to other fields.

ALECSO and the Agency also cooperate in translating into French the ALECSO website dedicated to publicizing Arab-Islamic culture, in support of dialogue among cultures through a better knowledge of the other.

3. Dialogue with the Latin Space

In view of the common history of the Arab world and the Latin space, and the mutual influence between them, ALECSO started a dialogue with that space through the Latin Union.

The Latin Union, an intergovernmental organization based in Paris, was founded in 1954 pursuant to the Madrid Agreement. It has 36 members from four continents belonging to the Latin linguistic and cultural space. Its aim is to promote and propagate the common Latin heritage through helping member states gain a better knowledge of one another, and preserve the different identities of the Latin world. It also aims to promote dialogue with the other cultures that have had relations of exchange with the Latin culture in the course of history. The official languages of the Latin Union are Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, and Romanian.

The agreement provides for cooperation and partnership relations between ALECSO and the Latin Union in the areas of education, culture, and science, through constant consultations, the exchange of documents and information, reciprocal representation in their respective meetings, and joint activities in the relevant fields.

The first implementation of this agreement will be a dialogue between the Arab and Latin cultures which will be initiated in 2006 in Sicily, Italy.

ALECSO: The Mainstay of Dialogue among Cultures

In addition to individual and bilateral actions, and conferences held to promote dialogue between the Arab and other cultures, ALECSO participated in meetings and symposiums held by international and regional organizations on dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

ALECSO's contributions stem from a strong belief that dialogue among cultures is a global issue that concerns everyone without exception, particularly in view of the rise of forces that advocate the clash of civilizations, make little of the values of other cultures, marginalize some of them, and do away with a number of others.

The global hegemonic schemes of these forces spare no other party. For this reason, the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization has endeavored to contribute, along with international, national and local cultural organizations and institutions, to the intellectual and cultural struggle to thwart the advocates of the clash of civilisations and make the necessary efforts in support of the belief in dialogue, interaction, solidarity, the right to difference and plurality in the different cultural and international spaces.

Consequently, the Organization has taken part in a number of Arab and international symposium and helped in their success.

1- With the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States

- ALECSO participated in **the Arab symposium on "Dialogue among Civilizations: Communicating rather than Fighting,"** convened by the General Secretariat of the League of Arab States on 26-27 November 2001 in Cairo, and presented a comprehensive view of information and cultural action to publicize Arab-Islamic culture and lay the foundations of dialogue between it and other cultures.
- ALECSO reached an agreement with General Secretariat of the League of Arab States in September 2002 to draw up **a joint action plan in the fields of dialogue among cultures and civilisations,** and Afro-Arab cultural cooperation, aimed at effective coordination between the two parties, further publicizing Arab-Islamic culture, and promoting dialogue with other cultures in the world.

2- With UNESCO:

- ALECSO participated in **"The International Symposium on Dialogue among Civilisations"** organized by UNESCO and the United Nations in Tokyo and Kyoto, Japan, from 31 July-3 August 2001, and presented a paper on the conditions and mechanisms of dialogue among civilisations.
- ALECSO participated in the **"Meeting on Interactive Dialogue among Civilisations"** convened by UNESCO on 17-18 June 2003 in Paris.

- ALECSO contributed to **the regional symposium (south-eastern Europe) on dialogue among civilizations**, jointly held by UNESCO and the Macedonian government in Omerid, Macedonia (ex-Yugoslavia) on 29-30 August 2003. On this occasion, ALECSO presented a paper on the Arab view of dialogue among cultures and cultural diversity.

3- With the United Nations Human Rights Commission

- ALECSO participated in "**The International Symposium on Education and its Relation to Freedom of Religion and Belief, Tolerance and Desegregation**," held in Madrid from 23 to 25 November 2001 by the United Nations human Rights Commission, and presented a paper on the role of education in the dissemination of the values of tolerance, desegregation and dialogue.

4- With the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO)

- ALECSO participated in the proceedings of "**The International Symposium on Dialogue among Cultures: from Theory to Practice**," convened by ISESCO on 13-14 November 2001 in Tunis, and presented a paper on "The Basis of Real Dialogue among Civilizations".

5- With Euro-Mediterranean Institutions

- ALECSO participated in **the conference on "Europe and The Mediterranean,"** held in Tripoli, Jamahiriya of Libya from 12-14 April 2002, and convened by Robert Shuman institute, and presented ALECSO's view of the role of Arab culture in the dialogue of civilizations.
- ALECSO participated in **the "Symposium on Cultural and Educational Dialogue"** convened by Euro-Mediterranean Union (EUROMED) from 1-4 May 2003 in Crete, Greece, and presented ALECSO's views on the role of education in promoting dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

6- With Member States

- ALECSO participated in "**The International Symposium: Islam and Peace**," organized by the Tunisian Ministry of Religious Affairs in collaboration with the Organization of the Islamic Conference from 15-17 April 2003 in Tunis, and presented a paper entitled "Cultural Diversity and difference of Thought".
- ALECSO participated in **the "Symposium on Dialogue among Cultures and International Solidarity,"** held by the Association of Tunisian Parliamentarians from 25 to 26 September in Tunis.
- ALECSO participated in the proceedings of **the "Ibn Batuta and Dialogue among Cultures Symposium"**, held by the national Moroccan committee for education, culture and science at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris on 8 June 2004.

- ALECSO participated in **the "International conference on Dialogue among Civilizations and Cultures"**, organized by the Yemeni Research Centre in January 2004 in Sana'a, Yemen, at the opening of the cultural event "Sana'a: Capital of Arab Culture in 2004," and presented a paper on the meaning of dialogue among cultures and cultural diversity.