

Participation of UCLG Africa Secretary General in 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue

The Secretary General, UCLG Africa, participated in the 4th World Forum on intercultural dialogue on the theme "Advancing intercultural dialogue: new avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development". The Forum was co-organized by the Republic of Azerbaijan, UNESCO, UNAOC, ISESCO, World Tourism Organization, and FAO.

The Forum was officially opened by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan His Excellency Mr Ilham Aliyev, who told the audience that the Forum gathered over 1500 guests from 123 countries, and 46 international organizations, with 200 speakers, in 40 different panels, which discussions will be aired through the UN television. He insisted on his speech on the multicultural nature of the Azerbaijan Republic. It is therefore no surprising that the first Forum on intercultural dialogue was organized in Baku in 2011. Baku process continued over the years and 2016 tagged 2016?the year of multiculturalism and the 2017, the year of cooperation between Islamic countries.

The opening ceremony also received speeches from the Director general, UNESCO, Mrs Irina Bokova; the High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilization, Me Nassir Al-Nasser; the Secretary general of the World Tourism Organization, Mr Taleb Rifai; the Secretary general of organization of islamic cooperation, Mr Yousef Bin Ahmad Al-Othaimen; the Director general of ISESCO, Abdulaziz Othman Altwajri; the Deputy Secretary general of the Council of Europe, Mrs Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni; and the FAO Director general, Mr Jose Graziani Da Silva. From the different speeches transpired the following: the world needs to make important progress in terms of intercultural dialogue in order to ease the tensions that globalization tends to fuel in almost all countries of the world, and which translate into the rise of xenophobia, racism, discrimination of those who do not resemble us, injustice, and ignorance. The time we are living in offers a lot of opportunities to reach out to one another, but despite this, most societies are fragmented and scattered into communities that are becoming irreconcilable by the day. We need through dialogue to learn how to bridge individuals and communities, how to foster trust and mutual understanding. Of course there are no quick fixes in that area. But some prerequisites are necessary to start the good step in the right direction:

1. Efficient and independent judiciary
2. Freedom of expression
3. Freedom of association
4. Well functioning institution
5. Inclusive society
6. laws to prevent discrimination
7. Guarantees provided for economic and social rights
8. Education for respect of cultural rights and identities
9. Infusion of values about ethical ways of life
10. Development of cultural exchanges across the world.

From the 30 panels and side events organized during the Forum the following take always can be highlighted:

Without active cooperation worldwide and the role of UN, it would be difficult to counter terrorism. Supporting education is important to resist the extremism narrative. UN Plan of Action for the fight against violent extremism insists on youth education and support, as well as refugees and displaced people.

To tackle terrorism there is need to understand that Internet and Social Media are key. The terrorists utilize this incredible connectivity of modern societies. Extremist groups use marketing techniques to penetrate families, recruit, and inspire attacks. People are spending more and more time of social media. This move will not roll back. Therefore we should be careful to acquaint ourselves with this new media. Fighting xenophobia is also fighting the recruitment tool for terrorists. But we should also be mindful of the risks of fake news and wrong propaganda, and to learn how to address these risks.

There is need to ask ourselves what drives a person to hate society and demonize the others. We need to appreciate the contribution of injustice, prejudice, and global intolerance in the behavior of young people. We need to pay more attention to young people who are the biggest users of the Internet.

We should also recognize that religion is one of the key reason evoked in the radicalization movement. Cultural diversity should be seen as richness not as a threat. We should start with the young people to bring the world back to a wise world. We need to teach them love for their families and respect for the values of the others and for their differences. They need confidence to overcome alienation. We need also to communicate with the youth, promote education against violence.

Dialogue is one of the best way to bridge gaps.

We need to work in complementarity and partnership. A mapping exercise on who is doing what is certainly a very useful endeavor. Partnership should strengthen the resilience of countries pertaining to their security. Communication space presents its own challenges but also opportunities.

We need to reach out to different audiences, explaining the common values that we cherish. Polarization and discrimination fuels resentments and threats of extremism.

As Pope Francis rightly stated it, faith is incompatible with violence. All religion professes the protection of life as a fundamental right.

Addressing violence was the privilege of the States. Nowadays many stakeholders are at the fore and are hit by this phenomenon. We therefore need to have a wider view on the fight against violence and extremism. We need to learn how to find a common ground, through facilitation, mediation and dialogue. The use of TV shows for youth mobilization is one way of finding such common ground. As former President Humphrey put it, peace is not passive it is active. Peace does not just happen it requires effort.

Solutions start with a counter narrative addressing the rejection mood that terrorists use to convince the young people to join their struggle. We need to work with women and the media. Solutions are at the family, community and local levels. Prevention is cheaper and better, if it engages all stakeholders.

We don't have any option but be optimistic, and at the same time also realistic: there are still ongoing conflicts, discrimination, injustice. Counter narrative should not be reactive but smart. We should address the concerning fact that big powers of the world solve issues between themselves in their own interest, not taking into consideration the notion of justice. We cannot and decrease tensions and impose universal values without justice. Many countries have been driven by ambitions, that is why we are failing to implement sustainable development for all. Talking is good, but concrete action is more important. We really need that all actors care about the urgency for justice and security.

During the closing ceremony, the Director General Unesco said closing session is a moment of commitment to act with new ideas. IShe insisted on the role of girls education as a response to extremism. The best arms to fighting extremism are books and fun. The opening of dialogue to all stakeholders is a huge breakthrough. We need a sense of urgency to act because the world

is very fragile and peace is very fragile. We need optimism to continue working to build peace in the minds of everyone.

The UN Alliance of Civilization High Representative emphasized on the commitment of all layers of society, and concluded that the issue of intercultural dialogue is becoming even more important. He pledged for more cooperation around the goal of preventive diplomacy to bring peace to the world. He mentioned that during the 10th anniversary of the Baku process next year, there will be an Prize on multicultural dialogue to be awarded to a personality who has dedicated efforts for peace and intercultural dialogue across the world.

Director ISESCO committed its organization for any further activity on dialogue, including the development of center on the culture of peace for Africa put in place in Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, with the support of UNESCO. Two other centers will be opened for Arab countries and Asian countries. Religions do not teach war but peace. The Forum is the best trade mark for peace and dialogue on peace and togetherness.

The Secretary General of the WTO said that when you succeed once, you had a good idea; when you succeed for the second time, you had a very good idea; when you succeed for the third time, you had an excellent idea. But when you succeed for the fourth time as the case of the Fourth Forum of Baku, you are rated as a traditional success story. This Forum came at the right time, at the right place, discussing the right issue:

- The right time, because we are all anxious to leave our children a better place to live in; recognizing that we made real headways during the last generation but not so much secured about the future of the next generation; hence our anxiety to act in order to address what could put the future of our children into jeopardy.

- The right place, here in Baku, as testified by the quality of people for the pride and the modesty they have shown us throughout the Forum within and outside the Forum. The people of Azerbaijan are the assets of this country.

- The right subject because the best arm against war and terror is intercultural dialogue. A lot has to be done in that regard, because our world is not going well. There is a lot to be done out there. We need to simply start interacting all of us, and all over the world. Intercultural Dialogue is about people meeting people to discuss Peace, human security and sustainability, intrinsically intertwined issues.

Preventive diplomacy followed with implementation beyond borders is the credo of the Baku process. This Forum is a trademark if the quality of the progress is proven. There is therefore need for more synergies. Avoiding duplication is a way to improve sustainability. Synergy is therefore paramount to have real sustainability and follow up. We need right people and right leadership for the Baku process to succeed.

The fifth Forum will be held in 2018.

On the fringes of the 4th Forum, the Secretary General also had a Side meeting with Louis d'Amore, President, International Institute for Peace through Tourism. Mr d'Amore mentioned that 2017 is the International Year for Sustainable Tourism. 2017 is also the 350th anniversary of the city of Montreal; and the 150th anniversary of the creation of Canada. The WTO congress will be held in Montreal next October, and would be interested to invite UCLG Africa and REFELA to address the Congress.

Mr d'Amore introduced the Secretary General UCLG Africa to Honorable Dr Eng. Walter Mzembe, Minister of Tourism and Hospitality Industry of Zimbabwe, Chairperson of UNWTO Commission for Africa. Honorable Mzembe is the African Union candidate for the position of Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization (WTO).

The Secretary General, UCLG Africa paid a professional visit to the ASAN, the State Agency for Public Service and Social Innovations.

ASAN is the regional hub of civil service conceived as a one-stop-shop public service delivery model in Azerbaijan. It builds on the concept of the New Public Management and the necessity to reshape the public service delivery, using the latest innovations in the knowledge and communication technologies. "ASAN Service unites under its umbrella over 230 services of 10 ministries and 25 groups of private entities, thus exemplifying Public-Private Partnership in the public service delivery". ASAN serves 6,000 users per day. It has over 400,000 likers on Facebook. ASAN won the United Nations Public Service Award in 2015. It has developed a series of partnerships including with other countries like Afghanistan. Contacts were made with some African countries like Egypt, Djibouti, Rwanda, Uganda.

ASAN is ready to cooperate with UCLG Africa on the following areas:

1. Prepare the teaching skills + practical training for ALGA courses;
2. Participate in the Forum on public service around the theme of improving service delivery;
3. Contribute to the preparation and organization of the local government service delivery award: definition of regulations and procedures; organization of the board of experts to be the jury of the award; definition of the terms of reference for the scrutiny of evidences presented by the candidates.

ASAN is prepared to respond positively to any demand presented by UCLG Africa for support on these three and other endeavors.

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Jean Pierre Elong Mbassi