

Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World

World Citizens Assembly

Lille - December 2 to 10, 2001

Thematic Group

UNITY-DIVERSITY

A. Definition of strategic lines and proposals of action formulated by the group on the basis of the "post-it method":

Three strategic lines were defined:

1. Act upon the media and the education systems for a better consideration of cross-cultural realities and a contribution to the dialogue of cultures
2. Take one's responsibilities as "cross-cultural middlemen" in the framework of a personal ethics and a collective ethics, and develop interpersonal exchanges.
3. Integrate cross-cultural issues into public or socially responsible governance.

The participants wished to precede the description of these strategic lines and the proposals that they contain with three general points constituting a foreword of sorts, or a set of essential facts that are preliminary to these strategic lines:

- a. Any in-depth action upon the dialogue of cultures and all cross-cultural aspects is conditioned by the world economic context. Not much efficiency can be achieved without having modified the facts to obtain a better balance between the North and the South, a fair world economy, and a true fight against poverty.
- b. Place human beings and their dignity at the center of any strategy for change.
- c. Refuse the idea of superiority of one culture over another, respect cultural diversity, develop complementarities, and guarantee the capacity for self-determination.

Proposals for change can be assembled within the three strategic lines defined above in the following way (in between parentheses, the protagonists: those who can implement these proposals):

1. Act upon the media and the education systems for a better consideration of cross-cultural realities and a contribution to the dialogue of cultures
 - 1.1. Press the media to practice more curiosity for cultural diversity (citizens' groups, journalists, supervisory authorities)
 - 1.2. Stimulate local intellectual and artistic creation and not allow the dominant global culture take over completely (public and private sector)
 - 1.3. Reformulate school and university curricula and reinforce the role of the education systems in cross-cultural awareness raising (citizens' groups, parents of pupils, supervisory authorities)
 - 1.4. Invest the new technologies to foster cross-cultural dialogue (citizens' groups, NGOs, academics, artists,

writers, etc.)

1.5. Develop translations and the practice of foreign languages (teachers, publishers, translators, public authorities, foundations)

1.6. Foster mutual cross-cultural knowledge through the circulation of artistic works (artists, public authorities, foundations)

1.7. Guarantee the independence of the media (public authorities, journalists)

1.8. Capitalize on the idea of culture (university, citizens' groups)

2. Take one's responsibilities as "cross-cultural middlemen" in the framework of a personal ethics and a collective ethics, and develop interpersonal exchanges

2.1. Put into practice cross-cultural dialogue through one's own lifestyle, open attitude, and curiosity (every individual)

2.2. Multiply the places and opportunities for interpersonal meetings among different cultures (trips, scholarships, systematic exchanges) (NGOs, universities, public authorities)

2.3. Implement strategies for fighting sectarianism and develop a critical attitude to one's own culture (citizens' groups, NGO, churches, teachers)

2.4. Work with religious groups to foster interreligious dialogue and condemn intolerance, including within one's own religious community (civil society, religious leaders)

3. Integrate cross-cultural issues into public or socially responsible governance

3.1. Draw up one, or several citizens' platforms for an international mobilization taking cultural differences into account (the Alliance, NGOs, citizens)

3.2. Develop citizens' exchange networks (NGOs, citizens' groups, the media)

3.3. Put pressure on states for them to protect cultural diversity, fight the oppression of minorities, and foster the complementarity of cultures (NGOs, citizens' groups, the media, writers, artists)

3.4. Set up international tribunals judging acts contrary to cultural diversity or to the fundamental rights of peoples, and require the application of the existing conventions (states, civil society)

3.5. Act upon states for an increased consideration of the issues of diversity and poverty (civil society)

B. Elements of discussion

During the discussion that followed the definition of the strategic lines, the participants raised a few questions about the subject being dealt with, but also about the dynamics of the Assembly:

1. Fundamental questions:

- Refusal of a museological conception of culture. Culture is a living thing, cultures are complementary and can enhance each other mutually.

- Not to reduce the problems to the North-South confrontation. Within every country, there are problems of terrifying corruption that generate this kind of confrontation.

- It is important to have a critical approach to the values within every culture. Cultures should not be set against each other. There needs to be an ethical globalization. There are some common values, said a Chinese participant, among which the following Confucianist idea: Do not require of others what you do not require of yourself.

- Call for a strong connection between power and culture.

- Insistence of the Brazilians on the issue of the connection between power and culture.

2. Expected outcome

Some participants asked the question of what the meeting was supposed to produce and how this would be implemented. For some, the Alliance should answer this question; others felt that, in any case, it is up to each of us

to give life, in the forms that appear to be best adapted, to the elements gathered during this Assembly. Be imaginative.

Reference was made to the Charter of Responsibilities, and to the “daisy” idea (a common trunk, and adaptations / complements in every country). And, speaking of the Charter, it was observed that the existing charters protect individuals, not groups.

3. Demand that the Assembly take a vigorous stand on today’s burning conflicts

A heated discussion began at end of meeting on the question of Palestine, Afghanistan, and a few other countries that are currently suffering (South Sudan for example). Some participants, in particular the Andeans and Palestinians, stated that the Assembly should not be content with long-term proposals but should also express collectively its condemnation of the occupation of the Palestinian territories by the Hebrew state. Others thought that if a motion was voiced, it should concern all parts of the world that are in conflict, and not only Palestine, or else that the role of the Alliance and the Assembly should be with long-term issues and the deep causes of the conflicts. Discussion was continued on the question of the definition of terrorism (state terrorism and group terrorism), on the connections being made currently between religion and terrorism, on the conditions of Peace. A very strong insistence came up again from several participants that a very vigorous motion should be voiced on the situation in Palestine.