

Alliance for a Responsible, Plural and United World

World Citizens Assembly

Lille - December 2 to 10, 2001

Thematic Group

Respect, Tolerance, and Dialogue of Cultures

1 / Identity of the workshop

Composition of the workshop: 13 different socioprofessional networks (Artists, Young People, Inhabitants, NGOs, Political Leaders, Women, Academics, Interreligious Leaders, Scientists, Journalists, Company Leaders, Local Elected Officials, Economy of Solidarity).

Languages of the workshop: French, English, Russian, Chinese, Spanish, Arabic.

24 nationalities, including a Palestinian, an Afghan, and Eminence Ruiz

2 / Introduction of the participants and facilitation

We took some time to introduce ourselves; the instructions were simple: to introduce oneself as a person, as a national of a country or a culture, as a participant in a socioprofessional network. Unfortunately, we did not have enough time to get full reports on the work of the socioprofessional networks. The participants had a good understanding of the concept of the meeting: to form groups as Socioprofessional Networks, and as Thematic and Regional Workshops.

The morning was facilitated by Étienne; but at the end of the session, one of the participants, Jean Vidaud, partially took over. He asked us to work in pairs for the rest of the workshop.

3 / Definition and appropriation of the name of the workshop

The name of our workshop: "Respect, Tolerance and Dialogue of Cultures" did not mean to imply that the different terms were dependent on one another. The term "link" was not to imply any causality, nor was it meant to determine an objective and the means to reach it. Étienne therefore proposed another formulation: "Dialogue among the cultures in an attitude of respect and tolerance." But the participants did not wish to make cross-cultural dialogue their objective; they preferred to consider it also as a means.

The only way to achieve a common objective was for the participants to re-appropriate the key terms of the formula, which they expressed by their wish to define these terms. We decided to adopt the "keyword" method. We asked the participants to define the words RESPECT, TOLERANCE, DIALOGUE and CULTURE with the help of three other terms or expressions using keywords. They first met in common-language groups to discuss what the keyword meant in their language, then, individually, they provided three terms or expressions on post-its. It should be noted that within a same language group the proposals were nearly all different, despite the previous collective discussion. In the end, we had collected about one hundred proposals for definitions. Once they had been pooled and validated, we obtained the following definitions.

For RESPECT: to be open-minded, to have confidence, to develop understanding, to be socially responsible, to stand up for equality, to stand up for all human rights, to stand up for values, to love, to listen to, to recognize others.

For TOLERANCE: to have a sense of what is collective, to exercise empathy (to put oneself in the Others' place at least to some degree), to develop understanding, to cultivate and to protect differences, to be open-minded, to recognize and to accept differences in Others, to exercise patience and humility in dialogue.

For DIALOGUE: to exercise sincerity and truth in dialogue, to develop understanding, to have (and to develop) the determination to meet and to listen to one another, to become richer, to respect differences when talking to Others, to search for common values mutually.

For CULTURE: to develop one's spirituality, to recognize all minorities, to protect diversity, to respect traditions, to defend languages, to be aware and proud of one's origin and one's identity.

For all these terms, every participant attempted to find their own objective, or at least "the necessary Utopia" that was to underpin all our work.

When all the proposals were on the paper-board (the Chinese decided to provide only one and the same definition), the people were invited to vote for the definitions, which was a very amusing and participatory moment. At the end, there was a perfect tie between two formulations: 14 votes for FRIENDSHIP AND PEACE and 14 votes for UNIVERSAL SOLIDARITY.

The participants also noted the recurrence of "UNDERSTANDING" in their work, and the difficulty, or even the impossibility of using the word "TOLERANCE."

Nota bene: the interpreters were considered as participants; they were invited to introduce themselves, and, if they wished to, to participate in the work, as long as it didn't hinder their interpretation work. It seemed unthinkable to us, in a workshop dealing with the dialogue of cultures, not to give the interpreters, who were our middlemen, an active role.

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1 / A determining proposal

At the start of the workshop, in the morning, we recapped Wednesday's results; inevitably, the participants were somewhat hazy after a one-day break. We proposed a strong strategic line - the only one that was in fact completely consensual, based on the work of the first day: To "converse among cultures," with, as a subtitle, the terms of our "necessary utopia": "Friendship and Peace - Universal Solidarity."

Once we had explained the morning's objectives (to determine concrete proposals resulting from this strategic line), a first proposal, surprisingly enough, was soon formulated: "to implement immediately, here and now, the action objective that we had set: to converse among cultures." There was general enthusiasm.

For all the participants it was clear that it was indispensable to spend a maximum amount of time talking, conversing, getting to know and acknowledging each other. The facilitators were assigned to facilitating the floor and to taking notes, notes that would be whenever possible changed into proposals.

2 / Testimony and experience reports

Testimonies succeeded one another, dialogue was generated. There was some sharp discussion on the "Tibetan events" and their perception by the Chinese delegation, but by applying the time allowances, we made sure that the dynamics did not become dynamite.

In the second half of the afternoon, we asked the participants, on the basis of the work of the socioprofessional networks and of their own discussions and personal experiences, to please advance one or two strong, concrete proposals.

We pooled them, as usual, with the following results.

Proposal 1: Educate for dialogue of cultures

Public targeted: young people, teachers, families.

Operators: public authorities (including national education systems), families, civil society.

Proposal 2: Open places of dialogue on the local, regional, and international levels

Public targeted: all socioprofessional sectors

Operators: public authorities and civil society (local, regional, global)

Proposal 3: Carry further and encourage dialogue with the media; encourage the circulation of the ideas developed in

the Alliance and in Lille

Public targeted: printed and audiovisual media, NICT

Operators: journalists who are Allies (special awareness raising at the Lille Assembly), civil society

Proposal 4: Improve knowledge of cultures

Operators: civil society and public authorities (in particular national education systems)

Proposal 5: Study human rights in all secondary classes of the world

Operators: civil society and public authorities (in particular national education systems)

Proposal 6: Set up networks of young people on the theme of dialogue among cultures

Operators: existing youth networks; national education systems

Proposal 7: Promote the recognition of minority cultures

Operators: civil society, public figures (along the example of Yehudi Menuhin and the Assembly of Cultures of Europe)

Proposal 8: Promote in particular cross-socioprofessional dialogue (including within a country)

Operators: socioprofessional networks of the Alliance, civil society

Proposal 9: Promote in particular women's action in cross-cultural dialogue

Proposal 10: Develop the learning of languages

Proposal 11: Raise peace-culture awareness

Operators: civil society, public authorities (in particular national education systems)

Proposal 11: Facilitate the free circulation of persons

Proposal 12: Make citizens responsible for the stakes involved in cross-cultural dialogue and exercise political lobbying

Public targeted: citizens, politicians

Proposal 13: Disseminate the Alliance's proposals through words