



THE RABAT COMMITMENT
Conclusions and Recommendations of the
Rabat Conference on Dialogue among Cultures and
Civilizations through Concrete and Sustained Initiatives
Rabat, Morocco: 14-16 June 2005

1. A broad-based expert-level “Conference on Fostering Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations through Concrete and Sustained Initiatives” was held in Rabat, Morocco, from 14 to 16 June 2005 under the high patronage of His Majesty King Mohamed VI. Convened by six co-sponsoring organisations - UNESCO, OIC, ISESCO, ALECSO, the Danish Centre for Culture and Development and the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures – and with the participation of the Council of Europe as observer, this event represents a unique international partnership initiative. It is aimed at identifying concrete and practical steps in various domains - based on a dialogue among civilisations, cultures and peoples - that the participating organisations pledged to pursue, jointly or individually, from 2006 onwards. The Conference was attended by some 100 participants from more than 30 countries.

I.

2. At the opening session, senior representatives of all participating organisations set out their vision and expectations for the Conference and the practical follow-up.

3. For ISESCO, its Director-General, H.E. Dr. Abdulaziz Othman Altwaijri, called for enhancing dialogue among cultures and civilisations through concrete initiatives that should be integrated into the process of sustainable development. He suggested that there was a need to acquire a profound knowledge of the other along with related history and values, and to establish relations on the basis of mutual respect and recognition of cultural and civilisational diversity. The Director-General called for a mobilisation of energies and capacities in order to promote a culture of dialogue and peaceful coexistence among people and respect for their diversity. Inter-civilisational dialogue should not be the monopoly of a single organisation nor of an academic; cultural or political institution. It should rather draw on the contribution the contribution of multiple stakeholders from all walks of life. ISESCO stood for a constructive dialogue that interacts with the other and shared common interests with all partner organisations.

4. For its part, ISESCO had taken a number of specific initiatives – through conferences, symposia, publications and studies - and was currently implementing a programme on establishing chairs for dialogue in Western universities and designating ISESCO Ambassadors for the Dialogue among Civilisations.

5. For ALECSO, its Director-General, H.E. Dr. Mongi Bousnina, underlined the necessity of dialogue and its efficient role in counteracting the mistaken theses of a clash of civilisations. Dialogue was at the heart of the Arab Islamic culture which encompasses dialogue and openness to others. He further reviewed various initiatives and measures that ALECSO had taken in the field of dialogue. In the field of education, prior attention should be focused on the purpose of learning to live together. This can be attained by means of textbooks and curricula, as well as through promoting the teaching of foreign languages, leading to a better knowledge of the Other. With

regard to the cultural field, Dr. Bousnina stressed the importance of translation and the conducting of joint cultural events in fostering mutual knowledge between cultures and civilizations. And as concerns the role of the information, ALECSO's Director General impressed the need for bending efforts towards highlighting the image of the Other in the media and finding new ways of presenting it via the Internet.

6. Representing the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Hans d'Orville called for a bridging of the theoretical approach to dialogue with a more specific and effective implementation, based on a concrete set of actions and modalities to be pursued by all partners in their work programmes. Much activities had been undertaken in the past dedicated to fostering a dialogue; yet the practical results and impact had remained limited and insufficient. Hence; there was a need for new and more refined approaches; which UNESCO for its part is proposing: a more dedicated focus on regional and sub-regional constellations, a discussion of specific thematic issues which are strategic entry points for true dialogue activities, and the involvement of a broad range of stakeholders; beyond the traditional governmental representatives. As a result, such efforts will allow a more direct dialogue among peoples and communities. The search for innovative approaches will also extend to artistic creation and creativity through an interaction between melodies and musical instruments from different cultures, to be demonstrated in a special concert during the conference. Ultimately, dialogue must contribute to peace and security by promoting collaboration through education, sciences, culture and communication.

7. Representing the Secretary-General of the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC), H.E. Mr. Saad Eddine Taib reviewed the significant efforts undertaken by his organisation over the past years to spread awareness about the importance of inter-civilisational dialogue in many parts of the world. He suggested that new approaches and measures were required, grounded in practical steps, to address the new global circumstances. He pointed to the rising danger of Islamophobia. New initiatives had already been launched by OIC, including with OSCE. He also noted that OIC had set up an observatory for monitoring and documenting cases of Islamophobia. Furthermore, he called for a review of textbooks and curricula in the West to counter an environment hostile to Islam. OIC was in favour of opening cultural and social dialogues with Western governments and Islamic communities in these countries with a view to building confidence and resolving practical problems. Dialogue cannot be an objective for its own sake, but must lead to real rapprochement and mutual recognition and understanding.

8. The Director of the Danish Centre for Culture and Development, Mr. Olaf Gerlach Hansen, underlined the urgency of implementing a range of practical initiatives which might foster cultural diversity and universal values, bringing it from the philosophical level to concrete and sustained action particularly in the areas of the media, culture and education. Such action must address ignorances, stereotypes and prejudices, create true dialogue instead of violence and conflict and build on the rich cultural diversity of humankind as a positive starting point. A particular challenge will be the contextualisation of art and culture. He suggested that participants in the Conference serve as facilitators in their respective communities and organisations, thus advancing the implementation of the action plan of Rabat. He offered to co-organise and host in Denmark in 2006 a follow-up conference to the Rabat conference, in the context of a major cultural festival on "Images of the Middle East".

9. The Executive Director of the Anna Lindh Euro Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures, Mr. Traugott Schoefthaler, called for engaging youth, for a dynamic understanding of universal values in the spirit of common standards to be achieved and for a particular focus on education. He underscored the necessity of going beyond traditional forms of dialogue between cultures, towards cooperation without mental and national frontiers. Priority of educational efforts should be provision of the intellectual skills necessary for dialogue, dialogue

being understood as occurring between individuals and groups, each of them exercising the human right to cultural self determination. Cultural diversity should not be linked to diversity between nations, ethnic, religious or linguistic groups. As stated in the 2001 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, dynamic, overlapping and multiple identities must fully be recognized. Mr. Schoefthaler welcomed the working document for the Rabat Conference as a platform shared by all six convenor organisations and he invited the Council of Europe to join this endeavour.

10. On behalf of Council of Europe, its Director of Education, Mr. Gabriele Mazza, expressed the support of the Council for the Rabat initiative. He underlined the meaning of unity in diversity in relation to the building of a humane and democratic Europe as a political and cultural project. Contributing to the diversity and to the establishment of a democratic culture had recently been declared a priority by the 46 Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe who had reaffirmed the pivotal role of education and cultural activity for understanding, solidarity and social cohesion. The Council stood ready to pursue and intensify its efforts in favour of intercultural dialogue and cooperation, including the religious dimension. For this purpose it would continue to redeploy all the means at its disposal in crucial areas, such as education for democratic citizenship and human rights, languages education, heritage and cultural policy, media, teacher training, pupil exchanges and youth cooperation.

II.

11. The Conference conducted its work in three separate workshops dedicated to concrete proposals for intercultural dialogue in the areas of education, culture as well as communication and science. The participants welcomed the background document prepared by the Steering Committee for the Conference, composed of all partner organisations, and endorsed the various action proposals contained therein. Moreover, the workshops agreed by consensus on the following set of action recommendations :

EDUCATION

12. General recommendations :

- a)** Intercultural dialogue must be based on universally shared values and the principles of peace, human rights, tolerance, and democratic citizenship, forming an integral part of quality education. It must therefore fully be taken into account in curriculum renewal and improvements in content, methodology, teacher education and the learning process, also involving parents and communities. Such dialogue plays an equally important role for the revision of textbooks, the production of new educational materials and the effective use of information and communication technologies (ICTs).
- b)** In curricula renewal, care should be taken to avoid oversimplifications and to raise awareness about cultural heterogeneity, its multiple dimensions and different sources and contributions.
- c)** More emphasis should be given to integrating intercultural learning in pre-school education and basic education, whilst pursuing it at secondary school level, in higher and continuing adult education in a life-long learning perspective.
- d)** Due attention should be paid to integrating dimensions of intercultural dialogue into non-formal education, literacy campaigns and to extra-curricular activities, such as youth exchanges and encounters.
- e)** Intercultural education should also be situated in relation to the phenomena of school and community violence, the need to respect differences and to address them in participatory and empowering ways.

- f) Educational programmes should provide sufficient information, especially for young citizens, on the major religions and highlight their shared values and ethical concerns, drawing also on history, philosophy, literature and the arts.
- g) Broader access to existing educational networks and initiatives, managed by international and regional organisations, and a much fuller and more creative use of their potential for intercultural dialogue should be pursued as a matter of priority.

13. Specific proposals :

- a) Clarify the concepts and reach consensus on definitions used in relation to intercultural dialogue and learning.
- b) Promote national legislation and international normative standards or instruments to guard against the defamation of the Other in school curricula.
- c) Produce guidelines on intercultural education, building on the research, publications and practice already carried out, such as with respect to world heritage and history education.
- d) Create a resource base of materials on good practices in intercultural education which could support teaching practice.
- e) Elaborate learning materials for intercultural education and dialogue, both for scientific and teacher education purposes, and ensure their broad dissemination.
- f) Ensure that intercultural dialogue and engagement become core content of both in- and pre-service teacher education.
- g) Develop capacities of learners to acquire life skills and competencies, with emphasis on problem-solving and critical thinking, as a prerequisite for intercultural learning.
- h) Pursue studies on stereotypes conveyed in school textbooks concerning the culture of the “other” and take action to correct them.
- i) Establish an interregional observatory on textbooks to monitor stereotyping, prejudices, inaccuracies and misconceptions in different subject areas and make provisions for corrective action.
- j) Place greater emphasis on the role of languages and their teaching as a means for intercultural dialogue and to pay particular attention to local languages especially in mother tongue literacy; furthermore promote the teaching of Arabic outside Arabic-speaking countries to foster understanding.
- k) Encourage intercultural dialogue in schools through creative learning, art education, drama, role play, song and music.
- l) Ensure intercultural dialogue across the curriculum, including physical education and sports with emphasis on traditional games and sports, youth encounters and exchanges as an important bridge to communication between cultures and youth in particular, and within the framework and follow-up of the 2005 International Year of Physical Education and Sports.
- m) Encourage intercultural dialogue at various levels of education through the conduct of practical projects and exchanges as well as competitions, building on the positive results already achieved with existing initiatives such as the Mondialogo partnership.
- n) Promote the creation of prizes rewarding excellence in intercultural exchange practises at national, sub-regional and regional levels and organise school-based festivals celebrating cultural diversity.
- o) Create additional university chairs on intercultural dialogue in various countries and cultural regions.
- p) Take full advantage of and mobilise existing networks relevant for dialogue activities specialized in dialogue within the partner organizations.
- q) Promote youth exchanges and summer school programmes and special intercultural events.
- r) Intensify the use of audio-visual materials and ICTs in support of interactive and participatory learning approaches to intercultural dialogue.

- s) Launch a media education project focusing on the need to instil and apply objectivity and critical thinking.
- t) Promote, in all these initiatives, the use of the internet for enhanced impact and broad diffusion of materials and resources and for intensified exchanges among teachers, students, researchers and curriculum developers.
- u) Ensure, in all these activities and initiatives the full participation of girls and women must be ensured, covering the entire range from conceptualisation and planning to the implementation.

CULTURE

14. General recommendations :

- a) Key concepts pertaining to the dialogue among civilisations, especially those relating to the construct of culture, civilization and religions need to be revisited by competent organisations and academic scholars in order arrive at definitions that can genuinely form a basis to further the dialogue. Consideration should be given to place culture as a frame for local belonging whereas civilization denotes a more universal phenomenon conferring a sense of recognition. Particular focus should be on commonalities rather than on differences.
- b) Creating the new space of a common educational platform is of considerable importance, so that cultural handicaps between teachers and students and gaps in knowledge and educational opportunities can be reduced. There is a particular urgency to tackle and ultimately eliminate ignorances, stereotypes and rejection of the Other, which requires a strong political commitment and engagement from all parties involved.

15. Specific proposals :

- a) Governments, especially in the Arab world, should more purposefully make use of bi- and multilateral cultural agreements as platforms for the promotion of intercultural dialogue.
- b) Governments should provide sufficient and predictable funding within their culture budgets for the encouragement of intercultural dialogue. These resources should be devoted to capacity-building of grass-roots cultural organizations, especially those aimed at empowering women and youth. Thus, civil society organisations should be encouraged and induced to monitor the implementation of cultural projects.
- c) International and regional organisations should identify, document and analyse “best practice” approaches and action at various levels in support of the dialogue among cultures and civilizations.
- d) The essential features of the partner organizations work on cultural diversity should be communicated and presented through appropriate learning materials at various educational levels, also drawing on contributions by partner organisations of the Global Alliance for Cultural Diversity.
- e) Governments and international organisations should offer programmes aimed at strengthening creativity in education, thereby also countering fundamentalist tendencies.
- f) Teaching history should also be linked to the teaching of art for children, allowing a canvassing of the world’s cultures. Special encounters should be organised to foster the ability of children to express themselves through arts and interaction without language constraints.
- g) Public and private entities managing museums should take initiatives to make museums more inclusive and to transform them into truly multicultural spaces.
- h) Practical measures should be taken by all actors engaged in intercultural and inter-civilizational dialogue to tap the power of music and musical creativity. Live interaction between music, melodies, original instruments and artists is a promising innovative

approach to further the objectives of dialogue, which international and regional organisations should more systematically promote.

i) Consortia should be formed between private and public partners to undertake the translation and publication of the great universal works and classics.

COMMUNICATION

16. General recommendations :

a) There should be full recognition that education requires communication, and communication always contains educative elements.

b) The educational system and the media have a role to play in order to avoid parochialism and contribute to the creation of conditions for intercultural dialogue.

c) There is a need to set up educational and media projects focussing on mutual information and the fighting of ignorance between the West and the Islamic world.

d) Face-to-face dialogue plays an important role for the creation of mutual confidence and trust.

e) Approaches must be developed to endow media professionals with the capacity to tackle intercultural issues within multicultural societies, especially in the Western world.

f) In the Arab world, media should be encouraged to mirror truly the rich diversities in the region and serving all segments of population.

g) A discussion should be conducted among media professionals about ethics and professional standards.

h) Measures should be taken to exploit fully the potential of the Internet for decentralized and diversified information flows and to enhance the opportunity for easy communications with members of other cultural and social groups irrespective of national or other boundaries.

17. Specific proposals :

a) Joint activities for communication and information professionals :

- Twinning projects at all levels targeting managerial, technical and editorial staff as well as reinforcing “visiting journalists” programmes;
- Joint production of broadcasts, newspapers, magazines and websites by journalists from different cultural backgrounds;
- Providing access to content through joint distribution projects, for instance through satellite broadcasting;
- Establishment of a satellite channel for intercultural dialogue on a non-commercial basis, to be funded by private and public sources;
- Reporting missions to specific areas/events fostering concrete collaboration between professionals with different cultural backgrounds, including through the use of scholarship programmes;
- Journalism school collaboration, including joint curriculum development, particularly in the field of multicultural reporting, as well as exchange programmes for both students and teachers;
- Establishment of an award for best media product in the area of intercultural dialogue.

b) Capacity building :

- Design of training aimed at fighting stereotypes, promoting facts-based journalism and conflict-sensitive reporting;
- Promotion of language training for media professions to lower language barriers for successful dialogue;

- Training in the use of ICTs for dialogue, especially for and through youth;
- Empower local minority communities to use media, including ICTs, for obtaining and disseminating information aimed at learning to live together;
- Strengthening media literacy and capacities to analyze critically media messages;
- Capacity-building of information professionals to set up and access a public domain of information in diverse languages.

c) Research :

- Undertake empirical studies on the portrayal of different cultures and civilizations in the media and on different forms of (self-) censorship and their impact in both Western and Arab media.
- Conduct impact analysis of major intercultural events and initiatives and disseminate results.

III.

18. The partner organisations commit themselves to an implementation of the various recommendations set out above. To that end, they agreed to maintain the steering committee of the co-sponsoring organisations which had prepared the Rabat conference, with a view to ensuring the best possible translation of these recommendations into reality and to prepare the Copenhagen follow-up conference in 2006. The Council of Europe will be associated with these efforts as observer.

19. The participants in the Conference also **urge the General Assembly of the United Nations, in the outcome document to be adopted at its High-level Meeting scheduled to be held from 14 to 16 September 2005, to give full recognition to the conceptual and practical lead role performed by UNESCO and the other partner organisations in promoting the dialogue among civilisations, cultures and peoples and in bringing about practical results through education, science, culture and communications and to reaffirm UNESCO's continued lead role in this respect.**

IV.

20. The participants expressed their profound appreciation to His Majesty King Mohammed VI, the Government and the people of the Kingdom of Morocco for the excellent facilities and the support extended. They thanked all co-sponsoring organisations for their initiative and preparation and, in particular, ISESCO for its invaluable contribution to the organisation of the Conference at its headquarters city, Rabat.