

# ***Global Dialogues***

## ***Is peaceful co-existence possible after polarization?***

**3 & 4 October 2016**

### **Introduction**

The diversity among human beings and of cultural expressions of our humanity is the most important heritage that must be cared for. This assumption requires developing societies that care for the “other”, in particular the “other” who lives and thinks differently. Such care is the indispensable step for generating a type of public culture that privileges a form of social interaction that can be called “learning in difference”. It is not enough to tolerate, a word that carries a sense of distance and closure in the face of the ideas and practices of the “other.” A society is culturally poorer if the possibility of dialogue, of sharing and learning from those who are different, is closed off.

With this idea in mind, the Secretariat of Federal Integration and International Cooperation of the Argentine Ministry of Culture organized a seminar entitled “Global Dialogues. Is peaceful co-existence possible after polarization?” on October 3 and 4, 2016. The event was hosted in the *Salón de los Pueblos Originarios* of *Casa Rosada*, in Buenos Aires. The occasion brought together ten international specialist of the utmost level from all over the world to share their expertise in conflict resolution and peaceful co-existence.

How can peace be achieved in societies polarized by conflict? How can we find points of encounter when different visions of the world clash? What are the best practices of dialogue and reconciliation? The conference tackled these questions, exploring patterns of intercultural dialogue that build bridges between groups and bring down walls among social sectors which have endured years of antagonism and confrontation.

Conclusions and concrete recommendations emerged from the meetings regarding peace-building and reconciliation. The discussions which took place patently demonstrated that no one path or strategy for peaceful conflict resolution exist, although diverse prevention and warning mechanisms can be put in place.

### **1- Diverse paths Nations have adopted in post-conflict reconciliation:**

**Aim:** To extract recommendations in policy implementation, from the experiences of countries such as Colombia, South Africa, Peru and Canada, which have collaborated in the path of post-conflict reconciliation.

### **Recommendations:**

- The creation of Truth, Reconciliation and Peace Commissions capable of recompiling testimonies and reinforcing the voice to the victims of the conflict.
- The creation of commissions to review the punishments for the victimizer and enforce the recognition of their crimes and atrocities committed.
- Establish mechanisms of restorative justice which take into account economic compensations for the victims.
- Involve all the pertinent social and political actors in the peace process, both those who pursue peace and those who are not yet convinced.
- Take into account the role which women can have in the peace process as promoters of intercultural dialogue and conflict prevention.
- Establish alphabetization programs, as well as psychosocial and social care for the victims of the conflict.
- Establish job training programs for those involved in the conflict.
- Conduct events which revalue the culture of the communities victims of violence, so that society as a whole can learn and be witness of the past. For example, the Canadian government carried out indigenous ceremonies at a national level in order to raise awareness of the past conflicts and respect indigenous protocols.
- Promote a sense of cultural belonging in public offices, where the civil service is obligated to incorporate principles such as non-discrimination, cultural diversity and the recognition of the ethnic variable.
- Establish strategies which identify those who remain invisible to society. Such strategies were conducted in Peru through the creation of cultural video libraries which enabled the indigenous communities to be heard, expressing who they are and to tell their stories.

### **2- Peace and Reconciliation construction strategies**

**Aim:** To extract recommendations taking into account investigations performed by non-governmental organization experts in conflict resolution and transformation, as well as the aims of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations in this area.

### **Recommendations:**

- To conceptualize different forms of violence (direct violence, structural violence, symbolic violence) in order to establish differential treatments of each form.
- Foster the cooperation between the State and NGO's in the communication of the terms of peace accords, assuring an adequate pedagogy for the optimal

comprehension by the citizenry. Recognizing that one of the obstacles to compromise and awareness of the population towards peace accords is disinformation or scarce information regarding the terms of the accords, which fosters information manipulation from those actors against the peace.

- Foster the inclusion of women in the process and implementation of the peace accords.
- Deliberate on the role religious leaders from different creeds can play in the construction of scenarios of encounter, dialogue and forgiveness. They constitute an essential element in the creation in spaces of citizenship participation in contexts of violence and polarization.
- Build a vision of intercultural citizenship where intra and intercultural dialogue prevails.
- Investigate and identify which sectors in society are a priority for dialogue.
- Take into account the existence of different identity groups in each community, work alongside them and establish dialogues with other groups and communities.
- Build counter-narratives against hate messages with the aim to convert peace messages into the dominant narrative through the use of mass media.
- Modify the manner in which we consider the “other”, as a way to discard prejudice and stereotypes. Consequently, not associate the actor with its actions because the action, as heinous as it may be, does not constitute the essence of the identity of that person as a human being. The challenge is to develop new identities without forgetting the previous one.
- Grant the action of listening a prime role, assuring time to listen to what the other has to say, both victims and victimizers.
- Promote in our dialogue more compassion to individuals and avoid identifying the other in relation to their group of pertinence (religious, ethnic, political, etc).
- Grant further importance to the education of culture an implicit value.

## Conclusions

### 1- Regarding Peace Processes

- Peace processes are highly complex and depend on the characteristics of the societies in which they develop.
- The key to success in a peace process is in the leadership qualities of the person in charge of the process.
- The equilibrium between reconciliation and justice is complex; sometimes, amnesties for the victimizers generate adverse situations.

- The political will to reach a just and equilibrated situation in a peace process must not be underestimated.
- Peace building always occurs in a scenario of asymmetric relations in regards to power correlations, power struggles and interests.
- The end to an armed conflict through negotiation is a long term work.
- Building peace is not only ending the conflict but, also, understanding that peace is a space where different people can dialogue, agreeing to continue together.

## **2- Regarding Intercultural Dialogue and Reconciliation**

- Culture in general and the promotion of a culture of dialogue from the state is the engine of reconciliation.
- During peace processes, dialogue does not need an objective, the simple deed of bringing people together and interchanging ideas is a step forward.
- Reconciliation processes are not linear because each actor needs to manage their expectations to rebuild a path together. In many cases the simple will to stop the massacre is a sufficient starting point.
- Positive dialogue exists when one person can talk and the other listens.
- Hope in the future is the most powerful tool against violence.

*“A nation which keeps one eye on the past is wise, a nation which keeps two eyes on the past is blind.”*