CONCEPT PAPER

Doha Forum: intercultural dialogue to boost development

(Revised on 10 September 2011)

Doha, 11-13 December 2011

Introduction

The Millennium Declaration, endorsed in 2000 by the whole international community, framed a new agenda for the 21st century engaging all countries in a global partnership for peace and development. It set common goals towards peace, security, justice and democratic societies, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to development, and the promotion in all countries of civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights for all.

Furthermore, the Millennium Declaration clearly recognized that a culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations should be actively promoted. Not only because human beings must respect one other in all their diversity of belief, culture and language, but also because differences within and between societies should neither be feared nor repressed, but cherished as a precious asset of humanity.

This is no coincidence. Culture and cultural diversity are an essential component of human development. Development policies and strategies are more effective if they build upon people’s distinctive identities and on their strengths. The self-awareness and pride that come from cultural identity are essential ingredients to reinforce the social fabric and build development solutions that resonate with a community’s sense of who it is. Furthermore, findings from business tell us that creativity, innovation and flexibility are essential to sustainable success and that many see managing diversity as providing an opportunity to play a winning game to ensure economic survival. Poor diversity practice leads to reduced performance and increased costs.

Culture is also a key dimension of peace and security. Several conflicts today have a cultural dimension and are constructed along ethnic and social fault-lines. Most conflict-prone and post-conflict societies face serious challenges because states are unable to protect, care for and empower their citizens and fail to provide for their survival, livelihood and dignity. But peace-building and the prevention of tensions and conflicts, on which development depends, require more than ensuring physical security and providing for basic needs such as jobs and poverty alleviation. It demands building or restoring social relations and trust, in particular after conflict. For that, it is essential to focus efforts on addressing grievances, repairing dignity and removing injustices to support reconciliation within a broader context of inclusive development and social integration.
However, in spite of being interconnected in various ways, culture, peace and development do not always go together in shaping a cross-cutting agenda underpinned by a holistic approach. To some extent this applies to the Millennium Development Goals’ Agenda which in a way lacks a complementary set of Millennium Intercultural Dialogue Goals that translate into concrete targets and actions those fundamental values essential to international relations in the twenty-first century, notably freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance and shared responsibility.

With only four years left to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) -- ten years after 9/11 and in the wake of major historic political transformations across the Arab world, and amid a global financial and economic crisis looming large -- the question of how to boost a global partnership for a more peaceful, prosperous and just world is an urgent one.

What is at stake is no less than charting a new course for the life of five of the six billion people in the world, in particular for the bottom billion of the earth’s people who live in countries that are not just lagging behind but are falling apart. But it is more than that. It is to join with millions of citizens, men, women, youth and children around the world to help them pursue a better life. It is to commit with peoples in every country and of every culture and faith to speak out for respect for universal rights and fundamental freedoms. It is to stand up with the burgeoning democracies in the Arab world and join efforts to live up to their aspirations for a life in dignity and respect so that they can lead by example. It is also to speak up against rising intolerance, xenophobia and racism in many parts of the world. Last but not least, it is to engage beyond elites and reach out to ordinary people – particularly young people - who will shape the future of our planet.

How can the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC) contribute to uphold the principles of human dignity, equality and equity at global level and be part of broad and sustained efforts to create a shared future, based upon our common humanity in all its diversity, making globalization fully inclusive and equitable? How can the UNAOC do more within its mission and its four main fields of action, i.e. education, youth, media and migration, to help realise universal human rights, achieve development and hence support the MDG Agenda?

The UNAOC was launched in 2006 by then Secretary General Kofi Annan with the sponsorship of Spain and Turkey. It seeks to forge collective political will and to mobilize concerted action at institutional and civil society levels to improve understanding and cooperative relations within and between nations and peoples across cultures and religions and, in the process, to confront and mitigate tensions and conflicts as well as to counter the forces that fuel exclusion, polarization and extremism.

The UNAOC combines both a universal scope – shown by its wide range of membership covering all continents, societies and cultures as well as by its inclusive and global perspective focused on promoting “democratic governance of cultural diversity” at large – and a specific priority emphasis on bridging relations between Muslim and Western societies, where events of the past decade have heightened the sense of a persistent gap and lack of mutual understanding.

Over the past five years the UNAOC has developed significant leverage and some resources to produce soft power and has become one of the most relevant UN platforms for intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation.

The Alliance holds annual Forums bringing together world political and corporate leaders, mayors, civil society, youth, journalists, academics, foundations, international organizations and religious leaders from all around the world. Annual Forums are a unique framework both to take stock of and to showcase at global level the progress made in the UNAOC agenda and at the same time to create new opportunities for participants to meet, network and bring about new projects and joint initiatives through which they reaffirm their commitment to the purposes and principles of the Alliance.

The 1st UNAOC Forum took place in Madrid in 2008, followed by Istanbul in 2009. The 3rd Forum, held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, created an unprecedented opportunity for showcasing the global scope of the UNAOC. Focused on the challenging topic “Bridging Cultures, Building Peace”, the Rio Forum stood as a kind of temporary hub for relationship building, social innovation, knowledge creation and catalysing innovative solutions to the world’s most pressing cross-cultural challenges.
The Doha Forum

The 4th global Forum of the UNAOC will take place in this context in Doha, Qatar, on 11-13 December 2011. It will focus on the main topic of how to translate into reality the potential of culture, cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in development. It aims to be an inclusive platform, bringing together the knowledge, experience and energy of a wide range of partners, engaged in developing new thinking as regards making diversity an asset rather than a liability and committed to taking action in order to build mutual trust across cultural divides and fostering development and peace around the world.

Indeed the debate on culture and development is not a new one. But the MDGs fail to include cultural indicators and many development strategies have largely been unable to address the human factor. Why does culture continue to be the stepchild in development while everyone claims it should be central?

Addressing this question and bridging the gap seems a much needed step to make the most of culture’s potential for social transformation and development at a time when so many significant changes occur in some regions of the world and the post-MDG agenda is being prepared.

It is not a coincidence that the coming Global Forum was preceded by consultations with civil society organizations which met together within a Pre-Forum that took place in Doha last May. These first ever consultations were not only part of a strategy of consolidating the role of civil society to achieve the Alliance’s goals, but also part of the vision of the 4th Global Forum as a key opportunity to reach out to the grassroots, put fragmented initiatives in a process of continuity and help communities make the case for the role of culture in development. Setting up a proper social movement that raises awareness of policymakers seems to be critical in integrating culture with development.

Therefore the 4th Global Forum will be dedicated to exploring further the key question of how advancing towards the goals of the UNAOC can contribute to foster sustainable development and in particular the achievement of the MDGs.

The task of equitable development, central to the agenda of the MDGs, is intimately linked to the UNAOC mission to deepen intercultural dialogue, trust and cooperation.

It is perhaps no exaggeration to state that not only are these agendas complementary; they are indeed mutually interdependent. Recognizing this, the 2010 General Assembly Resolution on “Keeping the Promise: United to Achieve the Millennium Development Goals”, states that “we acknowledge the diversity of the world and recognize that all cultures and civilizations contribute to the enrichment of humankind. We emphasize the importance of culture for development and its contribution to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals”.

War, intercultural conflicts and economic imbalances remain the greatest obstacles to the MDG ambitions. Thus it has long been recognized that peace and dialogue amongst all nations ought to be actively promoted, and global political solidarity built, in order to create the conditions in which equitable development becomes possible.

At the heart of this quest lies the challenge of bridging fundamental divisions amongst nations, cultures and civilizations. Better inter-cultural relations are fundamental for global security and peace which in turn is a prerequisite for a more equitable world.

Furthermore, development programmes can only be achieved in a context of dialogue, trust and cooperation – and in societies that are increasingly diverse, this implies a concerted pursuit of better cultural relations within diverse countries and societies.

Put differently, any hope of achieving justice (in its broadest social sense) requires a certain level of political and social reconciliation, not least in post-conflict areas. Justice, in turn, cannot be achieved through subjugation, not even well-intended subjugation, or top-down processes. Deeper and better justice for a majority of citizens is rather the outcome of sustained meaningful negotiation and working together, of reconciliation processes painstakingly built from the bottom up – even if and
when groups are still exhibiting ‘anger’ at one another. In this context the UNSG recently said that “an overarching element in the design and implementation of all successful policies (of inclusive economic growth) is the full use of mechanisms for social dialogue with employers’ and workers’ organizations”.

In turn, and conversely, it is also recognized that global security and better cultural relations depend crucially not only on dialogue and trust-building, but indeed on a more equitable and just world order. Launching the 2011 UN Millennium Development Report, Secretary-General Ban Ki moon stated that thanks to the MDG agenda global poverty was expected to dip below 15 per cent by 2015, well ahead of the original 23 per cent target. “At the same time, progress has been uneven. The poorest of the poor are being left behind. We need to reach out and lift them into our lifeboat. Now is the time for equity, inclusion, sustainability and women's empowerment”, he said. In this climate it is not hard to see how new cultural tensions are generated, new stereotypes and hatreds fostered, when some benefit from international efforts and others do not.

Intercultural trust is therefore both a condition and a result of equitable development. It stands at the beginning and the end of development. Yet it is also an essential resource along the way. Culture – defined broadly as the sum of social practices and mental structures or worldviews, as well as all kinds of artistic expressions – is recognized as an indispensable asset to any holistic and equitable development programme that would seek to enhance human capacity to realize that which is seen as intrinsically valuable or worthy. UNESCO’s Declaration on Cultural Diversity states that it ‘is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence’.

Not only is cultural identity an important source of human dignity and social cohesion, but it also expresses society’s most widely held ethical beliefs and moral parameters which a development programme can only ignore at its own peril. In this regard, better intercultural understanding may be essential to achieve higher levels of gender equity, education and youth development— all key goals of the MDG agenda.

For these and other reasons, there has been a strong emphasis on and a normative commitment in most academic literature over recent years towards valuing the cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity of all. Not only is culture a developmental resource, but cultural diversity is recognized as inherently being a valuable and indispensable tool for a holistic notion of human dignity.

Yet at the same time it is recognized that a formal commitment to culture and cultural diversity does not always translate into effective policy. Difficult questions about the paradoxical relationship between cultural diversity and social cohesion is one example of the complexity policy-makers face when seeking to turn political commitment into social reality. Contributing to this particular paradox is a complex array of tensions between unity and diversity, between individuals and the group, and between migrant communities and the wider society to which they belong. The ongoing debates in a number of countries over so-called multiculturalism policies clearly illustrate the need for a carefully crafted understanding of intercultural dialogue from different but interconnected perspectives.

In a nutshell, through informed debates underpinned by a variety of nuanced perspectives, brought by world’s top leaders, innovators and change-makers, the Doha Forum is expected to raise key questions on how to energize development through a culture of peace and dialogue among all civilizations.

With the wave of changes occurring in the Middle East in particular, but also with respect to the shifts around the world more generally, the Doha Forum will help build a strong, more unified global society that addresses the world’s acute problems. Building upon evidence through the stories of people, successful cases and failures, the debates in Doha will help to create a strong vision of the positive impact of culture and diversity on development.

Through its results-oriented and integrated approach the Doha Forum is expected to shape a process that will lead to a two-edged turning point: generate renewed political commitment and determination to collectively advance and strengthen the UNAOC agenda; and enhance the global partnership for
peace and development by endorsing a number of concrete UNAOC targets that meet grass-roots needs and expectations which will help achieve the MDGs.

Three Main Topics

To achieve the goals mentioned above, the Doha Forum will focus on three main topics. These topics will firstly be raised within plenary sessions which are the largest sessions of the Forum, designed to define and frame the Forum’s agenda; afterwards the same topics will be examined in breakout sessions that drill down into issues presented in the preceding plenary sessions from the perspective of the four fields of action of the Alliance (education, youth, media and migration) and will assess opportunities for action focusing on how to execute commitments. In action network meetings participants will finally tackle very specific issues, generally a subtopic, and collaboratively will discuss opportunities for action with other members.

The three main topics of the Doha Forum are:

- How does cultural diversity matter in development?
- Promoting trust and tolerance to advance development goals
- New strategies for intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation

1. How does cultural diversity matter in development? The missing link

Global economic, social, cultural and political developments are shaping a seemingly borderless world where persons, capital, goods, services, ideas, knowledge and information move in varying degrees of freedom and at different paces/rates between countries and regions.

Looking more closely at today’s global economy, two of its most remarkable aspects are the rapidly growing interaction among people around the world and the creation of faster, deeper and broader economic growth than at any other time in history. In some ways, this interconnectedness has brought us closer together and diminished our differences, creating openness and engagement. But it has also heightened awareness of our differences, generated defensive responses and in some cases fuelled conflicts in which cultural differences are used to divide and polarize populations. On the other hand, economic growth has also been accompanied by widening disparities, between rich and poor both between and within countries. When developmental gains run mainly along cultural lines, these economic divides may also serve to heighten existing cultural divides or even to open new lines of conflict within communities when elites benefit disproportionately at the expense of grassroots communities. Furthermore the global financial crisis, and the prospect of renewed recession, adds additional pressure on a range of societies struggling to remain stable – a trend and linkage that is well documented. With no immediate remedy in sight, this situation is also likely to lead to the further demise of social cohesion and to heightened cultural tension in vulnerable societies as social divisions harden in competition for scarce resources.

And in every part of the world tensions, conflict and poverty rob individuals not only of the basics of life – including food, drinking water, shelter, clothing, healthcare, or primary education as expressed in the MDGs – but also of life, dignity and opportunities to strive.

One of the main challenges facing our societies is in terms of engaging their members to create prosperity and well-being. In this regard diversity matters. First, in most if not all countries the population is diverse in one way or another, in varying degrees -- and not just because of migration alone. There is indeed the mix of gender and age, adhesion to different values and beliefs, language variety, a multitude of professions and occupations, etc., but also the sense of belonging to and affiliation with different socio-cultural categories and communities, including ‘national or traditional minorities’ and immigrants and their descendants. Second, because this diversity has to be
accommodated to social cohesion that notably enables persons to develop and use their diverse capacities and affiliations to participate on an equal footing in producing and sharing prosperity and well-being.

How do we capitalise on diversity and not make it a dividing force? How do we appreciate contributions that are different in kind and quality? How do we make cultural differences a driving force for development? How do we plan for a diversity advantage at the workplace, the marketplace, in the public domain and in cyberspace? How do we articulate what members have in common and turn it into a common asset?

In plural societies, freedom of choice, equal treatment, respect for differences, dignity, tolerance and solidarity are core values. Dialogue and negotiation are invaluable mechanisms for keeping these societies together. These societies act on what unites people and overcome what divides them, thus responding to challenges and capitalising on opportunities.

Effective management of cultural diversity and deliberate fostering of inter-cultural understanding seem essential ingredients for political governance to go forward, as well as for managing the development processes designed to produce a fairer, more inclusive and therefore more stable global economy. There are plenty of successful stories that build development upon cultural diversity both in the workplace, the marketplace but also at local community level.

This session will raise problems and dilemmas ahead and will focus on success stories for managing diversity, valuing it as a main driving force of change, and for creating new opportunities for development.

2. Promoting trust and tolerance to advance development goals

Increased human mobility and more porous national borders are resulting in the emergence of highly diverse multicultural societies in many parts of the world. The cultural, religious, ethnic and socio-economic diversity that migrants bring with them presents opportunities for social inclusion and development. But it can also engender serious challenges at the social policy and political levels.

In fact, diversity and cultural pluralism have historically presented serious policy challenges for governments everywhere but particularly in Western émigré societies. The dilemma has related to how to accommodate such diversity with its underlying notion of ‘difference’ articulated by minority groups, while maintaining an over-arching sense of belonging and inclusion within the broader society at large.

Some Western governments have adopted specific social policies to deal with rising levels of diversity. Multiculturalism was such a policy, conceived as a progressive integration tool aimed at managing cultural diversity in a way that offers some protection for migrants’ cultural rights. But it has nevertheless received a fair amount of criticism since it was introduced in the 1970s. Most recently, the leaders of a number of countries have expressed strong criticism of multiculturalism which they declared to be counterproductive to social integration and in some cases ‘an utter failure’.

The most obvious problem that has resulted from this crisis of multiculturalism -- especially post 9/11 -- has been a sharp increase in identity politics and racism towards specific cultures and faith communities, especially Muslims. Furthermore, negative media commentaries about migrants and so-called ‘aliens’ has had the dangerous effect of creating moral panic among citizenry about the undesirability of all ‘those’ who are different from us ‘culturally and religiously’. The recent terrorist attacks in Norway were committed in the name of fighting the ‘Islamization of Christian Europe’. This is a clear indication that what is reported in all forms of the media can influence and shape people’s attitudes and actions beyond the local confines of any particular state. As a result of such representations, cultural diversity is now increasingly linked in the public’s mind with risk, fear, anxiety, vulnerability and alienation.
Debates about diversity have been a longstanding feature of societies in the developing world too. Increased vulnerability to extreme weather conditions, famine, war, under-development and political oppression, coupled in some cases with rapid globalisation, uncontrolled urbanisation and dramatic, if uneven, economic growth, have caused, and continue to cause, massive population shifts in many parts of the world. Large-scale displacements in many parts of the developing world typically stem from a complex combination of social, political and economic factors – but almost always result in the escalation of ethnic and cultural tensions in areas where the migrants or displaced populations eventually settle. Cultural and ethnic tensions are, therefore, a central feature of conflicts across the developing world. It stands to reason that culture could also play a central role in ending these conflicts, replacing them with sustainable peace and development processes.

These ever-new fissures and fault lines across the globe are often further compounded by a lack of adequate governance of diversity, whether by governments or relevant international agencies. Rendering these situations still more complex is the proliferation of often inequitable, unsustainable, exclusionary and unfair patterns of economic development, and increasing inequalities within and among countries, even when economic indicators for a nation or region may seem generally positive. A powerful and current example here is Tunisia, -- for so long portrayed as an exemplary student of international economic programmes -- only for its prolonged inequitable distribution of wealth and employment opportunities to act as the catalyst for the Arab Spring.

Debates on this topic will focus on challenges ahead to set transformative changes in our societies of the 21st century in order to reconcile diversity and social cohesion, restore trust and tolerance, and boost prosperity. Participants will highlight successful stories of strengthening human security, enhancing dignity with its fundamental cultural dimension, and boosting development through dialogue and shared action aimed at promoting tolerance or acceptance and non-discrimination, including respect for spiritual values, conscience, religious and cultural or linguistic background and the right to communicate freely, as well as trust within and among communities.

3. New strategies for intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation

Successful intercultural dialogue is essential to help us navigate the unprecedented challenges of the 21st century world. It represents a dynamic and challenging process that enables individuals and groups with different cultural backgrounds to engage in an open and respectful exchange of views, share experiences and ultimately develop a better understanding of each others’ aspirations and practices of living together. Public policies and political initiatives designed to engender intercultural dialogue can be seen as strategic instruments to promote cultural diversity and cooperation and also facilitate social cohesion on the basis of human rights, solidarity and fairness. However, practitioners often feel alienated from political discourses and divisions. Civil society actors are well positioned to respond to this dilemma and ameliorate its ramification. Intercultural dialogue should be a ‘lived priority’ of the institutions and actors of civil society.

However, intercultural dialogue covers various meanings and comprises different but interconnected perspectives, ranging from a dynamic process by which people from different cultures interact to learn about and question their own and each other's cultures (national perspective), to a way of equipping individuals with "intercultural competences" to participate actively in increasingly diverse societies on the basis of democratic values, citizenship and civil rights (international perspective), and as a process that seeks to approach multiple viewpoints, taking as its starting point the recognition of difference and the multiplicity of the world in which we live (global perspective).

Depending on which level it operates, intercultural dialogue can therefore provide a communication avenue where understanding has become complicated; open new channels of conflict resolution where other mechanisms fail; and/or help break down judgmental, stereotypical views when existing institutional arrangements fall short.
To explore further these distinctions this session will ask the following question: what can the various communities bring to the table, and what can they teach the world -- drawing on their unique cultural resources -- in order to make poverty history and achieve the Millennium Development Goals? This may be specifically relevant in pursuing greater gender equity, youth development and education.

In order to explain the increasing demand for public recognition of cultural rights put forward by different groups and individuals in contemporary multicultural societies, we need furthermore to explore the relationship between the identity of an individual or a cultural/religious group and its normative recognition in the public sphere. When these two positions are not reconciled, intercultural tension may arise. Intercultural tensions in this context reflect a demand for equal recognition based on the modern notion of ‘dignity’ that presupposes equal status of cultures and genders. Panellists might therefore explore the promise of a ‘human dignity’ approach that complements human rights frameworks in dealing with collective and individual claims for cultural rights.

In this vein, it is also worth reflecting on how dialogue could be facilitated, not only between opposing cultures and ‘civilizations’, but between the globalised elite and various local groups, in many cases strengthened as a result of a reaction against what is perceived as the “imperialism of globalisation”. This may involve finding practical ways to talk, not only to moderate cultural positions, but also to engage dialogue with people who do not necessarily recognize it as a means to overcome divides and for problem-solving. This is a third issue that will be raised in this debate.

**Expected outcomes**

As in previous Forums, the “DOHA Commitments and Outcomes” will be compiled in a document summing up the main conclusions of the debates as well as the new initiatives launched or announced at the 4th Global Forum.

The launch of a number of new flagship multi-stakeholder actions (2011-2015) that illustrate how culture and intercultural dialogue impacts human development is under examination.

The members of the Group of Friends of the UNAOC represented at various levels at the Doha forum as well as other major partners might reaffirm their commitment towards the UNAOC by endorsing a joint statement, the Doha Declaration.

**Format and methodology**

The philosophy of the annual UNAOC Forums is to create platforms for exchanges and interaction among a wide array of players and stakeholders from all walks of life and regions. The various working sessions will bring together Heads of State and of Government and official delegations, heads and representatives of international and regional organizations, international financial institutions and Cooperation Agencies, parliamentarians, religious leaders, representatives of civil society organizations, members of the UNAOC Youth Global movement and of the network of alumni, private sector, prominent academicians and intellectuals, artists and media.

The geographical balance of the audience will be ensured, but particular emphasis will be given to the Arab/Gulf region as well as to representatives from sub-Saharan Africa, China, India and other Southeast and East Asian countries.

A number of national representatives as well as representatives of international organizations members of the UNAOC (Focal Points), experts and representatives from the UNAOC youth movement, including the network of alumni (Fellowship Programme and Summer School) will also be invited to participate.
The format of the three-day programme will be mainly interactive in order to facilitate exchanges, creative thinking and further collaboration between all the participants.

Following the usual practice, the programme will include namely: a high level opening ceremony; plenary sessions; interactive thematic round tables at Heads of State, Ministerial or senior official level for policy dialogue on key priority issues; parallel tracks for parliamentarians, civil society and the private sector; a partners’ breakfast for the community of Donors and Sponsors of the Alliance following the 1st Replenishment Session to the Voluntary Trust Fund of the UNAOC held in October in Turkey; workshops and lab sessions on projects, and action network sessions; a cluster of group discussions, organized at the request of partners, offering participants an opportunity to focus on a subtopic and collaboratively discuss opportunities for action with other members; and the Doh’Art Intercultural Festival, a world cultures festival to celebrate harmony in diversity and promote peace, intercultural dialogue and togetherness through music, arts and dance. The four-day programme will include performances, exhibitions and workshops.

A series of background and working documents will be shared with participants ahead of the meeting in order to prepare the discussion and make the meeting as effective as possible. Participants will also be invited to submit statements in advance that will be posted on a secure website to permit interactive discussions at the forum.

ANNEX: overview of the draft Programme of the Doha Forum
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</table>