THIRD GLOBAL FORUM OF THE ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS, in Rio de Janeiro

BRIDGING CULTURES, BUILDING PEACE

Thematic Session #1, ‘Democracy, Good Governance and Cultural Diversity’, 28 May 2010, 14.30 - 15.45

Background

The overarching theme for the Third Forum ‘Bridging cultures, building peace’ provides a good opportunity to reflect on the various mechanisms that can be put in place or reinforced in order to foster peaceful coexistence between peoples of diverse origins and cultures around the world.

There is no doubt that democracy is an instrument for peace. It is has been adequately proven that democracies do not go to war against each other. This is because democracies are founded on the rule of law, freedom of expression and due respect for a plurality of views, which foster peaceful coexistence within and across national borders. Indeed, democracy is based on common values shared by peoples throughout the world irrespective of cultural, political, social and economic background.

It follows that the institutions and processes of democracy must accommodate the participation of all people in homogeneous as well as heterogeneous societies in order to safeguard diversity, pluralism and the right to be different in a climate of tolerance. Parliament is the central institution of democracy. Where parliaments are socially and politically representative (including men and women, youth, linguistic, ethnic, cultural and religious groups), they become the preeminent forum for mediating the conflicting interests of society and promoting dialogue and reconciliation.

Political tolerance is the foundation of democratic dialogue and political pluralism. It means accepting and respecting the basic rights and civil liberties of persons and minority groups whose viewpoints differ from one’s own. Indeed, diversity of viewpoints and of peoples in a society is not something to be feared but celebrated as an asset and as a source of strength to the entire body politic. Diversity can help in the quest for freedom and opportunity that is at the core of democracy.

Yet democracy today is gravely challenged, among other things, by intolerance, resulting in violations of human rights including freedom of speech and the continued exclusion of minorities from political participation. Intolerance breeds resentment and brings about misunderstanding between peoples and nations. It provides a breeding ground for hatred and radicalism that finds its ultimate expression in terrorism.
The UNAOC can play an instrumental role in promoting tolerance among peoples leading to peaceful coexistence within national borders as well as between countries, thus promoting a culture of peace.

**Questions for discussion**

The session will provide an opportunity to discuss the underpinnings of democracy and how it contributes to greater harmony within and among nations. In particular, the discussions should focus on:

1. Means to guarantee political tolerance and respect for the plurality of views including ethnic, cultural, and religious perspectives as well as other forms of minority expression within society. Understanding diversity as a force for social good and as a defining and nurturing feature of democracy.
2. Promotion of and co-operation for democracy between nations, taking into account the specificities and cultural diversity of each nation but not compromising on the core values of democracy. Striking a balance between mutual respect and the need to protect human rights and the fundamental values of democracy.
4. Other instruments and processes of social and cultural cohesion, including the formulation of a policy statement and a national plan of action to promote intercultural dialogue and bring about effective institutional change at all levels of government.

The panel should result in a series of recommendations for action that can be fed into the agenda of the UNAOC.

**Organizing partners**

The Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parliament of Brazil, the Carter Center and Latinobarómetro.