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

BRIDGING CULTURES, BUILDING PEACE

Thematic Session #4, ‘Living Together in Urban Societies’, 28 May 2010, 14:30-15:45

Background

Today’s urban communities are becoming more and more diverse and it would be easy for cities to fall into the mindset of considering this a problem or even a threat. However, for cities with the vision and the skill to embrace their diversity, and conceive new modes of convivencia, there is the potential of great social, economic and cultural reward.

Whilst the voices of national institutions may seem to dominate the discourse on migration, this working session acknowledges that cities will have an increasingly important role to play. Ultimately, it may be the interaction between global factors of economics and ideology and the local policies of city halls and everyday practices of city streets that determine whether or not we can live together and co-operate in this changing world. The session will explore this local dimension and particularly the advantages cities can achieve from overcoming barriers of ethnicity, culture, social status and distance and connecting people - across neighborhoods and across continents.

It acknowledges that because of history and location, cities will have a variety of perspectives on these issues and develop different patterns and models to address diversity. The session will also recognize the experience of places where cultures may have co-existed for centuries (peacefully or otherwise); and the places where colonial and emancipation processes have created complex hybrid societies (not least Brazil itself). It will highlight some of the strategies and competences which a new generation of intercultural cities is evolving to realize their ‘diversity advantage’. Participants will hear about practical methods to resolve disputes and build dialogue and will explore the places and spaces where a common urban citizenship can be created. They will also hear about how new ideas and innovations may emerge when apparently discordant forces meet and mix in the cosmopolitan city.

The session will interweave three related strands of city action by exploring through practical examples: (a) the emerging intercultural city approach to integration and diversity management; (b) the use of city diplomacy as a tool for conflict prevention and resolution through mutual relations of learning and support between cities; and (c) the rich experience of cultures living together in the host city of Rio de Janeiro.

The session will be convened by Phil Wood who will draw upon his key text ‘The Intercultural City: Planning for Diversity Advantage’ to set the scene. It will highlight practical experience from United Cities and Local Governments, the Council of Europe and the Government of Brazil. It will also feature local knowledge gathered from preparatory work by Phil Wood,
Tom Fleming and local officials and civil society of the city of Rio de Janeiro. Finally it will feature the responses of mayors and practitioners of several international cities.

The outcome will be a positive step forward to a shared understanding and to closer working relations between different networks and to mapping out the future agenda for the local dimension in the work of the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

Questions for discussion

1. What practical methods are available to resolve disputes and build dialogue?
2. Where are the places and spaces in which a common urban citizenship can be built?
3. How can new ideas and innovations emerge when apparently discordant forces meet and mix in the cosmopolitan city?
4. What lessons are drawn from the following three practical examples: (a) the emerging intercultural city approach to integration and diversity management; (b) the use of city diplomacy as a tool for conflict prevention and resolution through mutual relations of learning and support between cities; and (c) the rich experience of cultures living together in the host city of Rio de Janeiro.

Organizing partners

The Council of Europe and United Cities and Local Governments with the collaboration of urban experts Phil Woods and Tom Fleming.