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

BRIDGING CULTURES, BUILDING PEACE

Thematic Session #6, ‘Human rights, ethics and solution to conflicts, 28 May 2010, 16.30 - 17.45

Background

Debates about human rights and cultural diversity often focus on the compatibility with international human rights instruments of measures taken by State authorities or their absence, in connection with the rights to freedom of expression and to religious freedom. These debates are certainly important for the Alliance as well, as its action is firmly rooted in the shared principles contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related instruments and it depends both on clear state commitments and an efficient implementation system of international human rights standards.

Yet, rather than re-visiting these debates, the present session will have a different, though related and complementary, object. It will also be more global in scope.

Because perceptions and attitudes of citizens are so crucial in the handling of diversity - it is not only a governmental affair - the session would look at the benefits that a more holistic and systematic human rights perspective in the daily workings of our societies can also bring to the objective of promoting mutual respect and cooperative relations across all sorts of differences. What is at stake here is the very practical recognition in everyday's life that "something is due to all human beings because they are human beings", that they all, whatever their differences, hold the same human rights and share the same dignity.

The session will discuss some of the measures and initiatives that can be taken to promote human rights "as a way of life" in increasingly diverse societies. Special attention will be given to concrete projects aimed at the realization of human rights for all, whether in challenging economic, social or political circumstances or in more stable environments.

Part of the discussions will also investigate how cooperation among independent national human rights commissions from different world regions can enrich our understanding of human rights in a globalizing world.

Questions for discussion

Confronting experiences, the panel will address a number of questions, including the following:

1. What does a more general perception of the existence of human rights bring to the development of respect and trust across cultural differences?
2. What can be done to help such perception grow and somehow relate to a global human rights agenda?

3. Under which conditions does energetic action towards human rights’ realization also benefit inclusion and respect for diversity?

4. In dealing very practically with the challenges of human rights realization in a globalizing world, what contribution can be drawn from the cooperation between independent human rights institutions from different regions?

The session is expected to identify innovative approaches and good practices in citizens’ mobilization for the realization of human rights. It may call for further studies on that theme. It may also draw provisional indications on the potential benefits of practical cooperation between independent institutions for the promotion of human rights in culturally diverse societies.