

## **Do One Thing for Diversity and Inclusion**

*By Irina Bokova and Jorge Sampaio*

All cultures contribute to the enrichment of humankind. Human beings must respect one another in all their diversity of belief, culture and language. Differences within and between societies should be neither feared nor repressed but cherished as a precious asset of humanity. This is a core challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

At the same time, we know well that living at ease with the landscape of diversities can pose challenges because communicating across differences is not always simple. This is true on the borders between countries. This is obvious in the tough neighbourhoods of our cities. UNESCO was created 65 years ago to promote the dialogue of cultures, to deepen understanding between peoples and to make the most of humanity's great diversity with full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. This is also why five years ago a new initiative - the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations – was launched to build bridges between societies, to promote dialogue and understanding and to forge the collective political will to address the world's imbalances.

To achieve these goals, we need renewed commitment and intensified collective action by states, by civil society, by the private sector. This must start with the involvement of individuals and communities at grass roots who will make a difference in building a culture of peace and dialogue in our age of diversity.

This is why UNESCO and the UN Alliance of Civilizations decided to launch a joint campaign on 21<sup>st</sup> May to celebrate together the World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development. This builds on the landmark agreement between the 192 member states of UNESCO in 2001 in the shape of the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity. The declaration stated boldly that “cultural diversity is the common heritage of humanity” -- “as

necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.” This declaration was a resounding rejection of the theory of the world caught in a clash of civilizations.

21st May 2011 must be a landmark in public activism -- to turn cultural diversity into a power for peace, security and development for all.

Globalization has deepened the links and contacts between cultures. Migration has increased, with humanity on the move more than ever before. New technologies have revolutionized information and communication, opening fabulous opportunities for exchange and cooperation, especially for young people.

However, every day, it is becoming clearer that we are not yet fully equipped to tackle such dynamic processes. Rigid stereotypes are back. As the world becomes more connected and societies more diverse, humanity still lacks the basic tools it needs to handle its own cultural diversity.

All of this makes the protection of cultural diversity and its democratic governance more urgent than ever. We believe our work must be sharper at three levels.

First, it is vital that we understand better the distinction between embracing *cultural diversity* – the vision of a pluralistic world where diverse peoples and communities with several affiliations and identities can cooperate in productive harmony – and focusing on *cultural differences*, the fact that these multiple adherences are becoming juxtaposed in new and sometimes dramatic ways. We must identify the moment when diversity turns into difference and difference into violence. These are the moments that we must work on.

Second, we need to develop “*cultural literacy*” to make the most of our diversity. The fact is we remain largely “illiterate” in our ability to understand diversity, to speak about it and to support and appreciate it. Every day the world cries out for new skills and new tools – for language learning, for cultural exchanges, for education in the humanities and the arts, for planning and running cities.

This starts with young people. The Arab Spring has made clear what we have always known: young people are not waiting for change, they are making it. This is a fabulous energy for innovation and creativity. Young people are not beneficiaries; they are drivers of change who must be given a higher stake in all decisions – in cities, countries and global communities.

Learning to manage diversity is a necessity, not a choice. This matters for individuals who feel they have a stake, it matters for societies to be healthy and it matters for states that are strong without being repressive.

Lastly, the link between the local and the global must be strengthened. The involvement of individuals at grass roots level is absolutely indispensable to reach a turning point.

To kick start this movement, and to mark this year's World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development, the Alliance of Civilizations and UNESCO are launching a joint global campaign *Do One Thing for Diversity and Inclusion*. The campaign has won the support and participation of several major corporations from Silicon Valley, including Yahoo, Cisco, Intuit, True Blue Inclusion, McAfee and Yahoo, among others. From UNESCO National Commissions to diversity councils and cross-cultural training, we will build a worldwide movement to celebrate diversity every year.

This initiative provides a framework for everyone to get involved in making the most of our diversity – through simple, every day actions. Learn a few words of a foreign language, check out world events through another country's news channel, visit an exhibition, help a social entrepreneur start a new project addressing the issue of diversity... you can share what you are doing with others on the campaign's Facebook site.

From the working environment to leisure grounds, the diversity challenge is one we all face. Join in!

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