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INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE OF LEADERS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

THEME

Cultural and Heritage Diversity of Africa and its Diasporas: Fires of Conflict or Ground of Peace?

04 October 2021

Concept note

INTRODUCTION

*« Mon cœur est devenu capable
D'accueillir toute forme
Il est pâturage pour gazelles
Et abbaye pour moines !
Il est temple pour idoles
Et la Ka'ba pour qui en fait le tour
Il est les Tables de la Thora
Et aussi les feuillets du Coran !
La religion que je professe
Est celle de l'amour
Partout où ses montures se tournent
L'Amour est ma religion et ma foi ! »*

Ibn Arabi (12th century Sufi Mystic)

In itself, this slam, as young people would say today, is a happy and beautiful poetic summary of the problematic underlying the theme of the present intergenerational dialogue: Cultural diversity and heritage of Africa and its Diasporas: firebrand of conflict or breeding ground for peace?

As a central element of any cultural heritage, religion (whether revealed or animist; imported or endogenous) is undoubtedly a determining factor in the construction of individual identity. Historically, this construction of self-identity has tended to take place in opposition to the "other", the one who is not us: the different. This different person is emblematically the one who does not share our faith. This difference in others becomes a threat to our faith and therefore a threat to our culture, our civilization. Everyone has his or her own faith, his or her own culture through which he or she defines himself or herself as a being, and no one wants to give it up at the risk of disappearing. This is how religious, cultural and heritage diversity becomes a source of conflict.

Anchored in his faith, and therefore in his culture, Ibn Arabi, the author of this poem, nevertheless gives a message of peace by making us understand that there is always a possible dialogue where there is cultural and religious diversity. It is always possible for us, without renouncing our personal, cultural and religious identity to open up to the other, to enrich ourselves alongside them, with them, and to build a life together. For Ibn Arabi, we must oppose and build cultural and religious identities that weave together, in opposition to murderous cultural and religious identities. This is the meaning of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, which is based on the idea and the promise that cultural and heritage diversity is a favorable ground to the construction of fertile social links and the germination of peace.

This call for intercultural and interreligious dialogue for living together and peace has been launched and reiterated by UNESCO through a number of standard-setting instruments such as the Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (October 2003) and the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (October 2005).

However, this salutary call for intercultural and interreligious dialogue is not always heard on the ground. Almost everywhere on the continent, identity differences are not always lived in harmony and intercultural and interreligious dialogue is, in fact, put to the test, for example, by the actions of numerous jihadist groups against other cultural and religious communities and against state authorities. Often inspired by Salafist Islam, these fundamentalist and radical groups are resistant to any intercultural and interreligious dialogue by advocating a symbolic break with other communities and by displaying a rejection of other faiths.

This rejection of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue is also the case in some evangelical churches, where many leaders and followers see other faiths as evil forces to be fought and consequently engage in combative proselytizing targeting these other faiths, whether they are non-native or native.

In the face of this challenge posed by the question of identity on the continent, there are, however, and fortunately, many initiatives (by the public authorities and/or civil society) that promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue for social cohesion and peace throughout the continent. Some of these initiatives are carried out by young people and their organisations.

This intergenerational dialogue will also be an opportunity for UNESCO to announce the launch of a global initiative to create a Ministerial Network on Youth. As a platform for high-level decision-makers and young people and their organisations, this network will be a forum for reflection and the sharing of experiences and good practices between countries and regions of the world that can inspire, in terms of appropriate responses, effective public policies to solve common problems in education, employment, health, well-being, etc. of young people.

OBJECTIVES

1. To impart knowledge and have discussions around national experiences in the political and legislative appropriation of the above-mentioned normative instruments (and many others) in order to create the conditions for cultures to flourish and interact freely in a mutually enriching way; to encourage dialogue between cultures in order to ensure more intense and balanced cultural exchanges in favor of intercultural respect and a culture of peace.
2. To create spaces for youth to connect and share their experience of identity in the face of others, of their commitment to intercultural and interreligious dialogue for peace in action, on a daily basis.

3. To leverage policy processes and high-level policy commitments towards how to concretely promote, in African States and in the Diaspora, the respect of cultural and heritage diversity for a peaceful coexistence of the multiple cultural identities of Africa? And how can we respond to the challenge of the growing diversity of origins and opinions within our societies and promote, in such a context, the culture of peace?

EXPECTED RESULTS

1. Adoption of a draft joint UNESCO-AU regional programme for the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a tool for conflict transformation, prevention of extremism, building and consolidating social cohesion and peace; a programme involving youth and their organisations.
2. Formalise the launch of UNESCO's global initiative to create a Ministerial Network on Youth.

PARTICIPANTS

As far as leaders are concerned, the participants of this forum will be

- Heads of State and Government
- Ministers in charge of Youth/Culture
- Commissioners of the AUC and the Regional Economic Communities in charge of Youth
- Representatives of UNESCO;
- Representatives of the United Nations, ICESCO, International Organisations and technical and financial partners invited to the Biennale;
- Representatives of the Citizens and Diaspora Directorate (CIDO) of the AUC;
- Religious and traditional leaders.

As for the youth, one hundred and fifty (150) young people (from all AU countries and 21 countries of the Diaspora) will be invited to take part in this forum online, with 50% young women and 50% young men, i.e. two people (one woman and one man, if possible) per country. These young people will be selected from members of National Youth Councils, National Coordinating Bodies of the Pan African Youth Network for the Culture of Peace (PAYNCOP)¹, the ICESCO Youth Network for Peace and Security and other youth leaders and organisations, through a call for applications process. The said call for applications will be conducted by an ad hoc Youth Committee.

¹ Officially launched in December 2014, under the aegis of UNESCO and the AU, with the support of the Government of the Gabonese Republic, as part of the call for the creation of a "Continental and Sustainable Movement for Peace" of the "Plan of Action for a Culture of Peace in Africa/Action for Peace", adopted in 2013, at the Pan-African Forum on "Sources and Resources for a Culture of Peace", PAYNCOP is a continental organisation present in some 40 countries. Its permanent Secretariat is hosted by Gabon.

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However, a limited number of ten (10) young people will participate in the dialogue and will therefore travel to Luanda. They will be chosen, on the one hand, under the responsibility of the three Organisations, from among the young associative leaders recognised by the UN, UNESCO, the AUC and ICESCO; and, on the other hand, under the responsibility of the ad hoc Youth Committee, from among the 150 young people who will be selected following the call for applications.

This list of ten (10) young people will take into account the gender balance and the representativeness of the Diaspora.