

4th WORLD FORUM ON INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Baku, Azerbaijan, 4-6 May, 2017

Concept note

Advancing Intercultural Dialogue: New avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development¹

At a glance: The 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue

The Baku Process helps place intercultural dialogue and cultural diversity higher on the international agenda as a critical element for achieving human security and as a prime responsibility of our time. The World Forums on Intercultural Dialogue (WFID) organised to date have brought together heads of governments, ministers, heads of various international organisations, senior policy makers, cultural professionals, goodwill ambassadors, experts, journalists, practitioners, prominent intellectuals and activists. WFID has become an established international platform to enable and encourage people, countries and organizations around the globe to take concrete actions to support diversity, dialogue and mutual understanding among nations by raising awareness on the importance of intercultural dialogue worldwide.

Discussion at WFID 2017 will place side by side intercultural dialogue, human security, peace and sustainable economic development, highlighting the interdependence of these and, importantly, the centrality of dialogue for peaceful relations and sustainable development, and hence human security.

Looking back: World Forums for Intercultural Dialogue

A core assumption of WFID has been the recognition that dialogue with those who are not perceived to be from the same cultural background is far from straightforward. In past Forums, discussions on intercultural dialogue has enabled discussion about uneven relationships: minority-majority, rich-poor, newcomers-residents or powerful-vulnerable. Even within a framework of mutual respect and without an emphasis on consensus, we have understood that the very platform upon which we ask others to come and engage with each other is often, and for the most part, uneven. Whether intentional or not, a dichotomy of advantage and disadvantage cannot simply be willed away, as well intentioned as intercultural dialogue practitioners may be.

So, as WFID has evolved, the requirement for the field of intercultural dialogue to draw from disciplines outside of dialogue and communication studies and from a variety of global, local, public and private contexts, as a way of engaging with the challenges, has become more important. The Forums have also recognised and acknowledged that the *utility* of intercultural dialogue – as both a concept and a toolkit – is yet to be fully measured and assessed. As such, applying intercultural

¹ The title “ *Advancing Intercultural Dialogue: New avenues for human security, peace and sustainable development*” has been adopted following helpful suggestions by UNESCO (UNESCO, Paris, 05 December 2016).

dialogue as a strategy for managing conflict in an increasingly globalised and connected world still requires much consideration. As diversity and the consequences of global conflicts have become more diffuse, strategies for cultural relationships have developed and spread. New experiences of cultural engagement in all walks of life have to be crafted to help us to cope with what is now a permanently diverse and connected world. Culture connects people of difference, and connection enables encounter and exchange. By enabling people to live together peacefully and constructively in a multi-cultured world, with a sense of global community and belonging, dialogue between and within cultures can become a powerful antidote to rejection and violence.

The WFID platform is a unique experience because it ensures, by its design and implementation, that key stakeholders – who might be referred to as the global connectors - are engaged. In addition, the presence of Ministers of Culture in Baku is a great asset, and it is proposed to involve some of these in the break-out discussions and to give to speakers and participants an opportunity for interaction. WFID reflects also that many participants, from all parts of the world, are developing meaningful projects to promote intercultural dialogue and diversity. WFID encourages enables many of these to be shared and showcased during the Forum.

2017: The 4th World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue

After three successful editions that mobilised major organizations and individuals involved in the promotion of intercultural dialogue and diversity, the fourth edition of the Baku Forum will be an important step forward.

It will build on the accomplishments of the previous editions, and will be an opportunity to deepen the reflections and to feature new ideas and experiences. It will also have to take into account the new political context in many countries around the world, with the rise of populism and polarisation and the emergence of a 'new nationalism' (*The Economist 19 November 2016*). This changed context will affect the nature of the discussions and the programme of WFID 2017. Peace, stability and economic development in all parts of the world may be profoundly harmed by the emergence of this growing national introversion, which is also a threat for the SDGs agenda. Hence, it is more important than ever to increase efforts to promote cultural diversity and inclusive societies.

New dimensions: The 1st High Level Meeting of International Organisations

Intercultural tensions and conflicts are not caused by the differences between or natures of cultures themselves, but more by the reality that societies are ill-equipped to effectively manage and overcome any challenges. While promoting dialogue and co-operation between the world's cultures and peoples and aiming to address existing problems and increase joint efforts in this field, the Government of Azerbaijan has put forward an initiative to organize the 1st High Level Meeting of International Organizations in the framework of the 4th World Forum. The goal in realising this High Level Meeting is to bring together the world's political, cultural, military, economic, social, financial and other international organizations to debate human security, sustainable development and inclusive society issues and trace joint actions to settle tensions between cultures and civilizations often times stemming from religious, cultural and social constraints. This fresh initiative will establish an additional platform to mobilise resources and conduct shared activities notwithstanding the universality of international organizations or regional status and area of responsibility.

New entrants: global connectors

The WFID Programme for 2017 will recognise the changing global political context and will seek to include all so-called Global Connectors and reach out directly to new entrants to WFID – notably the private sector, such as global, local and technology based companies particularly those committed to social impact and broader human security goal and the international financial institutions (Banks, IMF, World Bank etc.) and other development agencies such as DfID, CIDA, USAID, ASEAN.

These new global connectors are placing new emphases within their research, policy and flagship events on the urgent need to build *Inclusive Societies*. The private sector is another important actor, and a somewhat untapped potential in the promotion of inclusive societies and trust building among people and cultures. Huge financial resources and experience can be mobilized through Corporate Social Responsibility budgets, philanthropy and corporate engagement, and breakout groups discussions at WFID 2017 will explore these potentials. The Baku Forum provides a unique opportunity to bring together the “global connectors” and the leading CSR organizations and to discuss concrete opportunities of collaboration to promote dialogue and inclusive societies.

Such new entrants will help WFID grow its influence towards building more inclusive societies – and promoting the commitment to ‘new avenues for human security’ that is central to the WFID 2017 theme.

New regional focus: Asia Pacific

So far, the debate on intercultural dialogue and peaceful coexistence has been focused mostly on the Western world and the Middle East. However, it is increasingly becoming an issue in the Asia Pacific region where more than half of the world’s population is living, a population that is extremely diverse. Innovative cooperation mechanisms are put in place to prevent tensions and mitigate the risk of radicalization. It will be interesting to hear from the Asia-Pacific perspective and to discuss possible exchange of experience.

New focus: Towards a more broadly defined human security

The new and changing global political context, the importance of finding practical ways to build and reinforce trust and promote economic development are prerequisites of dialogue that creates a sustainable improvement in people’s quality of life. The focus on human security has brought new attention to the consequence of both natural and human-driven insecurity, the strong relationship between violent conflict and poverty, as well as the importance of food security. Overall human security is threatened by both violent conflict and natural disasters. We are pleased to be joined by FAO in this regard, and the second Plenary reflects this new imperative.

2017: Towards a more comprehensive conceptualization of intercultural dialogue

At its best dialogue is the essential toolkit, helping people to cope with unprecedented challenges and conflicts and the pace of change within our modern world. Dialogue can support and help sustain peaceful relations. But too often the prerequisites that dialogue remains an open process of exchange and respect between individuals and groups of different cultures, points of view and aspirations, built on a foundation of human rights and fundamental freedoms, are overlooked and not met

As we know, effective dialogue between people of difference and with different needs and agendas is vital for real and sustained peace. And we appear to engage with it a lot. On the global stage, world forums are convened to bring together heads of governments, ministers, heads of various international organizations, senior policy makers, cultural professionals, goodwill ambassadors, experts, journalists, practitioners, prominent intellectuals and activists. These platforms enable us to take concrete actions to support diversity, strengthen mutual understanding among and between nations and communities, and raise awareness of the importance of dialogue.

Intercultural dialogue in the post-2015 era is important due to the sheer compression of the world, bringing people and their cultures into the same space with intense speed, creating new levels and forms of human interaction and interdependence. Mutual respect - not the same as mutual approval – will be crucial. Reasoned disagreement builds stronger, more authentic and lasting relationships. Avoiding difficult questions (such as political conflict or differences in values) will be counterproductive, whereas addressing them directly and with respect will build trust.

At a time when the world's efforts are focused on sustainable development for all, the challenges are often multidimensional and interrelated, with the needs of the most vulnerable being compounded by prejudice and stereotypes that must be challenged holistically.'

A final thought: Intercultural dialogue is important because it allows long-term and intensive engagement with people from other cultures. This can help people see their own culture from a different perspective, which leads to re-evaluating their own views and ideas. At the same time dialogue also re-introduces some of the detail – the diversity – into our perception of others.

