

World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue
Baku, 7-9 April 2011

Workshop on “Women as key agents of intercultural dialogue”
8 April 2011

CONCEPT NOTE

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Based on the achievements of the International Baku Forum on “Expanding the Role of Women in Cross-cultural dialogue” and namely on its Declaration (June 2008), this timely workshop is of great significance as it aims to define a theoretical and operational framework in order to promote women as key agents of intercultural dialogue, the latter understood as a continuous process inspired from shared universal values.

This is even more topical inasmuch as peaceful co-existence requires that all members of different groups learn to better understand one another, moving beyond existing stereotypes and prejudices. Culture influences our views on gender issues and roles. It can inform debate in this area through intercultural dialogue which includes interreligious dialogue, making the difference between cultural and social practices and bridging real or perceived tensions around culture and human rights. Culture thus plays a central role in finding sustainable avenues towards gender equality and justice.

Taking into account the complexity and the variety of the political, social and cultural contexts worldwide with their numerous reference points, it is suggested to do justice to the diversity of women's experiences and aspirations in order to enhance this dialogue, to diversify its forms and to widen its scope. To do so, a deeper understanding of the nature, modalities and obstacles to intercultural dialogue in relation with women is needed namely in the fields of education, research, media, sciences and culture, by:

- demonstrating that gender is above all a social and cultural construct and that there is no single way to achieve gender equality by showcasing various strategies women use to empower themselves in traditional and modern societies;
- analyzing the link between gender, culture and development;
- identifying priority areas for policy makers to direct the discussion on gender issues in the arts, culture and media;
- helping women to create new spaces of dialogue and action that are both participatory and culturally diverse;
- lending support to specific initiatives by women and men that instead of merely turning difference and diversity into a statement of identity, aim to transform it into a source of creativity;
- strengthening women's already established skills in networking in civil society, academia, policy making and media;
- generating the enabling conditions which allow a greater involvement of women, whether as artists and cultural producers or as managers.

Intercultural dialogue is a process that demands not only the recognition of cultural diversity but also the shared values that underlie it. These fundamental values are those inherent to the human condition, such as freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility, respect for others, regardless of diversity of belief, cultural background, gender and language. Other globally relevant values are empathy, solidarity, awareness of the fragility of the planet, respect for and the upholding of cultural diversity, human dignity and human rights as well as the commitment to peace, non-violence and peaceful practices. Women have a very important role to play in making this dialogue visible and accessible.