



ACTION PLAN FOR 2010, International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures

1. Introduction

Although the world seems increasingly interconnected and interdependent in all areas of human activity and at the global level, relations between peoples, nations and cultures have not been strengthened. Instead, incomprehension and mistrust appear to have grown in recent years. Amid a widespread sense of vulnerability, there is an imperative need to come up with new ways of preserving peace at the national and international level.

The United Nations General Assembly, considering the matter to require urgent action, proclaimed 2010 the International Year for the Rapprochement of Cultures and designated UNESCO to play a leading role in the celebration of the Year, capitalizing on the Organization's invaluable experience of over 60 years in advancing "the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples". In so doing, the General Assembly recognized the pioneering long-term work carried out by UNESCO. Committed to its core mandate, the Organization has always sought to "develop and to increase the means of communications between peoples for the purpose of mutual understanding".

In line with UNESCO's mandate, 2010 is both the culmination of the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence for the Children of the World (2001-2010) and the starting point of a new strategy. In a shifting international context, UNESCO gives increased importance to this theme which is at the forefront of the objectives of its Medium-Term Strategy for 2008-2013: "The fostering of cultural diversity and of its corollary, dialogue, thus constitutes one of the most pressing contemporary issues and is central to the Organization's comparative advantage", that is, recognizing the great diversity of the world's cultures and the links uniting them.

2. Year 2010 goals

The main goal of the International Year will be to demonstrate the benefits of cultural diversity by acknowledging the importance of the transfers and exchanges between cultures and the ties forged between them since the dawn of humanity. As cultures encompass not only the arts and humanities, but also lifestyles, different ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs, the protection and promotion of their rich diversity invites us to rise to new challenges at the local, national, regional and international levels. This will involve integrating the principles of dialogue and mutual knowledge in all policies, particularly education, science, culture and communication policies, in the hope of correcting flawed cultural representations, values and stereotypes, and demonstrating that diversity enriches humanity.

3. Strategy for 2010

The Director-General has consulted by circular letter Member States and partner organizations in order to obtain their comments and suggestions for activities to celebrate the International Year. Based on their replies, four major themes were identified and included in the preliminary action plan submitted to the Executive Board at its 182nd session and to the General Conference at its 35th session. They are: (i) promoting reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity; (ii) building a framework for commonly shared values; (iii) strengthening quality education and the building of intercultural competences; and (iv) fostering dialogue for sustainable development. Furthermore, it was recognized that the success of the Year depended to a great extent on accepting the cardinal principle of the equal dignity of cultures, mutual respect and the strengthening of cooperation for lasting peace.

3.1 Promoting reciprocal knowledge of cultural, ethnic, linguistic and religious diversity

Any dialogue requires basic knowledge about the “other”, including his or her history, language, heritage and religion. The International Year will encourage increased awareness of the history of civilizations and highlight any process which has spurred intercultural dialogue and the rapprochement of cultures, with particular attention paid to young people.

In parallel, action during the International Year can concentrate on an acknowledgement of the role of languages, linguistic diversity, multilingualism and translation as essential vectors not only of access to information and knowledge but also of the advancement of intercultural dialogue.

Similarly, the cultural heritage, a common good of humankind must be preserved for future generations as a record of human experience and aspirations, so as to foster creativity in all its diversity and to inspire genuine dialogue among cultures. For this very reason, the cultural heritage often becomes a prime target in conflicts. Nevertheless, this heritage can become a rallying point for the recognition of shared roots between cultures and the reciprocal influences they have had on one another. The International Year can promote the importance of a shared tangible and intangible cultural heritage through the various conventions on the protection of cultural heritage and in particular the 1972 and 2003 Conventions administered by UNESCO. The International Year can also promote intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding through creativity and the arts, and can further stimulate awareness-raising of cultural expressions through media, ICTs and new technologies as well as museums and foundations.

A major objective of intercultural dialogue – of which interfaith dialogue is a part – is to promote dialogue on religion between communities and leaders of different religions, faiths and convictions, with a view to increasing mutual knowledge about spiritual traditions and their underlying values, thus helping believers and non-believers to better understand and respect one another.

3.2 Building a framework for commonly shared values

Intercultural dialogue is a process which demands not only the promotion of cultural diversity but also the recognition of shared values. It consists of values such as freedom, equality, solidarity, tolerance, respect for nature and shared responsibility – which the Millennium Declaration has reaffirmed as “timeless and universal”. These fundamental values are anchored in tolerance implying respect for others, regardless of diversity of belief, cultural background, and language. Other universally important values are: respect for and the upholding of cultural diversity, commitment to peace, non-violence and peaceful practices, the empowerment of women, respect for human dignity, and observance of human rights. As

such, the importance of public places and special events such as cultural festivals, religious gatherings and sports events should be emphasized during the International Year, as these places and events offer privileged venues for cultural interaction that is beneficial to all.

In light of this, it is important to underscore the crucial role played by the media, particularly in countries and regions torn apart by conflict, often between different communities.

3.3 Strengthening quality education and the building of intercultural competences

Quality education should be primarily grounded in respect for human rights as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and should equip the learner not only with knowledge and values to understand the other, but also competences which are specific to openness and appreciation of cultural diversity. This includes the revision of the content of national textbooks and history books, learning materials and curricula, taking into account diverse learning styles and life experiences, and cultural and linguistic diversity. Likewise, the role of the teacher in interpreting textbooks and developing learning materials that induce and prepare young people for dialogue and teach them to think critically must receive high attention. The UNESCO Chairs and the Associated Schools Project Network in particular must focus on acquiring new intercultural skills in order to reinforce human and institutional capacities.

3.4 Fostering dialogue for sustainable development

New spaces of dialogue are also offered today by sciences. This includes modern science as well as traditional science, exploring ways to ensure that indigenous knowledge systems are recognized in their contribution to sustainable development and alternative development models in environmental and agronomic domains. Building on global environmental issues will foster dialogue about sustainable development and measures to address the consequences of climate change and shared water resources.

Against a changing international landscape, the need to organize and manage cultural pluralism at all levels and in a democratic manner remains a vital and indispensable landmark towards achieving lasting peace. Hence, there is a need to multiply the platforms of exchange and to collect innovative practices that are conducive to cultural pluralism at local, national and regional levels. Raising awareness of cultural expressions of minorities, migrants, indigenous peoples and other disadvantaged and excluded groups to foster respect and mutual understanding for social cohesion will thus be an important feature of the International Year.

Lastly, dialogue and rapprochement must be pursued both between and within cultures in order to lay the groundwork for a harmonious coexistence. The United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (DESD, 2005-2014) for which UNESCO has been designated as the lead agency in the United Nations system, is an excellent vehicle for this. By including principles of cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue in education systems, this Decade aims to spread the knowledge, skills and cultural values needed for a peaceful and sustainable future.

4. Modalities of implementation

For this International Year to truly bring cultures together, it is necessary to: (i) to mobilize not only States but also civil society as a whole in order to reach those who do not feel concerned by the issue; (ii) adopt a holistic approach which incorporates those of other agencies in the United Nations system, States and intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations; (iii) capitalize on UNESCO's invaluable achievements in the area of intercultural dialogue, particularly with respect to young people and the question of gender;

(iv) promote positive examples and original projects, particularly on the occasion of political, cultural and sporting events at the national, regional and international levels; (v) also capitalize on United Nations world/international days related to this topic, especially those for which UNESCO has been designated lead agency; (vi) revitalize cooperation agreements between UNESCO and various governmental and nongovernmental organizations in a multidisciplinary and inter-agency approach; (vii) raise extrabudgetary funds to finance relevant projects.

A significant number of specific activities – around 300 – are already being considered by Member States and various international and local partners, as well as the UNESCO Secretariat. All replies received and the new proposals submitted throughout 2010 will be available for consultation on UNESCO's website. The main types of activities scheduled are:

- (a) greater opportunities for research, meetings and public debates and broadening of the spaces for intercultural mediation in the form of exhibitions illustrating exchanges and transfers between cultures, as well as fairs and festivals, using in particular places such as museums, art galleries and foundations, and making use of new technologies that specifically foster linguistic diversity and translation;
- (b) promotion of the role of creativity, which is a fundamental attribute of innovation, by stressing both individual features and similarities of societies, and in that regard, enhancing the promotion of an integrated vision of all aspects of the cultural heritage as a bearer of history and identity that must be preserved, a resource and engine of sustainable development and tool for intercultural dialogue, which includes interreligious dialogue;
- (c) improvement of access to formal and non-formal education, with emphasis on quality education for all, education on human rights, cultural diversity, gender and the integration of marginalized groups and the strengthening of South-South and North-South-South interuniversity cooperation, particularly through creating sites of excellence and innovation;
- (d) contribution of the media and the new communication changing the perception of different cultures and religions through, *inter alia*, the promotion of dialogue on the Internet where numerous cultural and linguistic expressions can be circulated and shared; or co-production fostering dialogue between media professionals from different cultures, particularly on delicate issues;
- (e) recognition and the respect of knowledge – including traditional knowledge and the knowledge of indigenous peoples – which contributes to sustainable development; the promotion of human rights, philosophy and intercultural dialogue, with particular emphasis on fighting racism and discrimination as well as on the culture of peace and democracy.

5. Partners

In view of ensuring the broad visibility of the Year and its greatest possible impact at the local, national, regional and international levels, UNESCO is going to strengthen cooperation with its partners: the National Commissions of Member States for UNESCO, agencies of the United Nations systems, intergovernmental, governmental and non-governmental organizations, Goodwill Ambassadors and Artists for Peace, UNESCO Chairs and Associated Schools, Clubs and Centres, parliamentarians, locally elected officials, the world of culture, science, education and the media, religious leaders and other opinion leaders as well as youth organizations.

6. Contacts

– Focal point for Year 2010 in UNESCO:

Division of Cultural Policies and Intercultural Dialogue

Director: Katérina Stenou (Tel. +33.1 45.68.43.03)

– Information on the presentation of projects, the logo and website:

Sasha Rubel (Tel. +33.1 45.68.46.06, email: s.rubel@unesco.org)

Susanne Martin-Siegfried (Tel. +33.1.45.68.42.75, email: s.martin-siegfried@unesco.org)

– Year 2010 website: www.unesco.org/culture