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**The Sana'a Call for Dialogue among Cultures and Civilisations**  
Adopted by the International Symposium on Dialogue among Cultures and  
Civilisations

Sana'a, 10-11 February 2004

The Sana'a Symposium on Dialogue among Cultures and Civilisations brought together – under the auspices of H.E. Ali Abdullah Saleh, President of the Republic of Yemen, and at the invitation of the Yemen Center for Studies and Research and UNESCO – some 50 personalities from the Arab world and other regions as well as representatives from the United Nations system. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Yemen, H.E. Abd al-Qadir Ba Jamal delivered the keynote address. All participants expressed their appreciation to the Government and people of Yemen for their hospitality and the excellent arrangements.

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Intensifying the dialogue among cultures and civilisations is a joint responsibility of all cultures and must be pursued through joint action and partnership so as to achieve a global human understanding.

The dialogue among cultures and civilisations is a necessity in the contemporary world in order to overcome obstacles, prejudices and re-emerging ignorances and to understand and learn from and about others and their experiences. "Civilisation" is a universal, plural and non-hierarchical phenomenon. A focus on antagonistic relationships between cultures and civilizations ignores that interactions between civilisations have experienced periods of creative tensions and frequently been a major force of development and progress.

Dialogue is under-utilised in the present globalisation process, though it is instrumental in the construction of a sustainable future everywhere. Multilateral approaches are too often replaced by unilateral solutions. The challenge is to go beyond general statements and to implement concrete action aimed at building a *culture of dialogue* and countering negative stereotypes. New approaches will be required for education, the sciences, cultural diversity, the media and information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly at regional and sub-regional levels.

**The quest for common values**

To be fruitful, dialogue should be rooted in the hearts and minds of people, nurturing a common base for human existence. Any dialogue must focus on the importance of shared values, which give meaning to life and provide form and substance to identities. Tolerance and respect for the Other are core values that transcend civilisational differences.

To promote an awareness and observance of universal values, ethical principles and attitudes lie therefore at the heart of a true dialogue. Moreover, respect for human rights and the search for inclusiveness and unity in diversity become particularly relevant in the context of rapid social and economic transformations.

Free, independent and pluralistic media, both regional and international, can aid understanding and must be cherished. That more voices can be heard thanks to the internet and satellite broadcasting is to be welcomed. These voices influence the perception of increasing numbers of people, especially among the growing – and often unemployed – young generation in the region. The media should be more aware of its influence, for good or ill, in that its performance can enhance or diminish dialogue. More discussion of such issues between representatives of regional and local media should be encouraged.

### **Education – an indispensable element to nurture and sustain dialogue**

Education at all levels – through formal, non-formal and informal approaches – has an inherent ability to nurture and sustain dialogue. We need both an *education for dialogue* and *dialogue for education*.

Many countries in the Arab world are struggling to provide adequate education for all, at the same time as many educational systems have to cope with insufficient funding.

The global Education for All (EFA) movement is an inseparable part of the agenda of each reforming society. Reforms of the education system in all countries must include revisions of curricula, textbooks, school and learning materials that will foster peace, dialogue and intercultural understanding at all educational levels. The symposium invites other regions to enhance their attention to the history and culture of the Islamic and Arab worlds.

The quest for gender parity in schooling – to be ensured by 2005 in line with the Millennium Development Goals – is a particularly important factor for the social and economic development of the region.

The region should be encouraged to pursue “quality education”. Its quest is to instil universally shared values, promote democratic practices, human rights and pluralism, reorient new generations of teachers, and develop competencies for the emerging knowledge society. Quality education is also a central component in any dissuasion strategy against fanaticism everywhere.

Cooperation among universities from different regions should be encouraged as well as student exchange programmes. In the Arab region, consideration should also be given to establishing centers of studies of America, Europe and other regions – as there are already Centers of Arab Studies in many other regions.

### **Striving for cultural diversity**

Today, each individual must acknowledge and be aware of the plurality of his or her own identity – anchored within societies that are themselves plural.

Beyond the diversity of traditions and cultures, Islam and the Arabic language constitute two predominant features of a common heritage of the region, which comprises culture, religion, science, literature, art, and architecture.

The ability to manage cultural pluralism as a constructive force determines the maturing of society and allows the latter to evolve to a situation where rational choices can be exercised in building a democratic society capable of integrating differences.

The region's heritage is an important and often overlooked dimension of the notion of modernity for Arab culture and civilisation. The sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List are receptacles of memory for cultural heritage both in its tangible and intangible forms. They embody the symbolic values of cultural identities and constitute a fundamental reference for structuring societies. Insofar as it enables people to understand themselves, cultural heritage is a source for one's own identity and a key to understanding others based on the acceptance of diversity.

Increasing the translation of seminal works, literature and research into and from Arabic will greatly contribute to learn to live together. This will also be aided by growing mutual receptiveness for films and other valuable cultural materials.

An intensive exchange and close cooperation in the cultural sphere and a partnership of tolerance in culture and education are of central importance. This partnership needs to be based on equality and comprehensive cooperation for a peaceful common future.

### **The Sana'a Symposium therefore calls for**

- the designation of Sana'a as a hub for future activities pertaining to the dialogue among cultures and civilisations in the Arab region;
- a dialogue among cultures and civilisations between the Arab region and other regions that challenges old and new forms of ignorance, prejudice and assumptions about "Otherness";
- a dialogue that promotes mutual understanding and exchange, tolerance and a culture of peace at the level of political decision-makers, intellectuals, actors of civil society, and individuals;
- a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts;
- a dialogue that begins at home, underpinning national unity and the political, economic, social and cultural integration of the region;
- the encouragement of processes of democratisation and non-discrimination, including the upholding of individual rights;
- action by political leaders in fostering dialogue and responding to aspirations of people;
- focus on the importance of leadership and the creation of institutionalised mechanisms for interaction and dialogue, thereby closing the gap between incumbent leaders and civil society, especially the young generation;
- democracy as the choice of the modern age for all peoples of the world, which cannot be imposed from the outside;
- justice and accountability as the basis for the rule of law in democratic societies;
- the introduction of various measures of quality education by governments in the region and, in particular, a continuation of efforts to reform curricula and textbooks;
- women's empowerment, education and knowledge to reinforce the creative pace of societies, social progress and modernisation;

- a stronger engagement of young people and women in dialogue activities;
- support and subsidy programmes to increase the number of books and publications translated from and into Arabic;
- intensified exchanges of films and other valuable cultural materials between the Arab and other regions;
- human development which places people at the centre of all development efforts by focusing on an enlargement of people's choices and the fight against poverty;
- a collaborative programme by UNESCO, ALECSO and ISESCO promoting dialogue through education, the sciences, culture and communication;
- cooperation and contributions by donor governments from outside the region in such a collaborative programme.

A successful dialogue will let peoples and countries from many different cultures and backgrounds come together – and not apart.