

Interfaith Dialogue

ภูมิหลัง

- ไทยได้ให้ความสำคัญกับการเสวนาระหว่างศาสนา ความเชื่อ และวัฒนธรรม เพื่อเสริมสร้างสันติภาพทั้งภายในประเทศและระหว่างประเทศ โดยได้เข้าร่วมการเสวนาดังกล่าวในการประชุมระหว่างประเทศหลายกรอบ อาทิ กรอบสหประชาชาติ (Alliance of Civilizations, Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace) และกรอบภูมิภาค (ASEAN, ASEM และ Asia Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue) ทั้งนี้ ไทยยังได้ดำเนินกิจกรรมที่ส่งเสริมความเข้าใจอันดีภายในประเทศระหว่างคนที่มีความหลากหลายทางวัฒนธรรม เชื้อชาติและศาสนา อาทิ การจัดให้มีการพบปะกันระหว่างผู้นำศาสนาทุกเดือน การดำเนินโครงการนำเยาวชนจากภาคใต้ไปทัศนศึกษาในภาคอื่นๆ ของประเทศไทยและประเทศเพื่อนบ้าน

- รัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงการต่างประเทศได้เข้าร่วมการประชุมระหว่างประเทศในกรอบ Interfaith Dialogue รวม 3 รายการในช่วงการประชุมสมัชชาสหประชาชาติ สมัยสามัญ สมัยประชุมที่ 62 เมื่อเดือนกันยายน 2550 โดยที่ประชุมต่างๆ ดังกล่าวมีมติที่สอดคล้องกันในเรื่องของการส่งเสริมความร่วมมือเพื่อสร้างความเข้าใจอันดีระหว่างประชาชนต่างศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งจะเป็นเครื่องมือสำคัญในการป้องกันและแก้ไขปัญหาความขัดแย้งและการก่อการร้ายในระยะยาว และช่วยส่งเสริมสันติภาพของโลก ทั้งนี้ สาระสำคัญของการประชุมดังกล่าวมีดังนี้

(1) การประชุม Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) ซึ่งที่ประชุมเน้นการส่งเสริมเครือข่ายพันธมิตรระหว่างอารยธรรม ความเชื่อ และศาสนาต่างๆ โดยให้ความสำคัญกับการดำเนินกิจกรรมในมิติด้านการศึกษา เยาวชน และสื่อมวลชน ในฐานะที่เป็นเครื่องมือในการเสริมสร้างสันติภาพ และเน้นการส่งเสริมยึดถือหลักคุณธรรมร่วมกันในสังคม อาทิ หลักขันติธรรม (tolerance) รวมทั้งการสร้างความเข้าใจอันดีระหว่างกัน

(2) การประชุม Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace ที่ประชุมเน้นความสำคัญของการเสริมสร้างวัฒนธรรมแห่งสันติ (culture of peace) ซึ่งให้ความสำคัญกับการส่งเสริมวัฒนธรรมการยอมรับนับถือซึ่งกันและกัน (culture of respect) ทั้งนี้ เพื่อเป็นพื้นฐานสำหรับการส่งเสริมหลักขันติธรรม (tolerance) การเคารพต่อความหลากหลายทางเชื้อชาติ ศาสนา ความเชื่อ และวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งจะนำไปสู่สันติภาพในที่สุด รวมทั้งเน้นการดำเนินงานที่มีประชาชนเป็นศูนย์กลางและส่งผลถึงสังคมโดยรวม ทั้งนี้ รัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงการต่างประเทศได้ส่งเสริมการนำผลการหารือระหว่างกันไปปฏิบัติโดยเน้นการส่งเสริมบทบาทของเยาวชนและสื่อมวลชนในฐานะเครื่องมือในการส่งเสริมสันติภาพ

(3) การประชุม High-Level Dialogue on Interreligious and Cooperation for Peace ซึ่งรัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงการต่างประเทศ ได้ย้ำความสำคัญของหลักขันติธรรม และการเคารพความหลากหลายทางศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งไทยได้ดำเนินมาตรการต่างๆ เพื่อส่งเสริมสันติภาพมาโดยตลอด โดยเน้นบทบาทของเยาวชนและสื่อมวลชนของประเทศไทยและประเทศต่างๆ รวมทั้งการส่งเสริมการศึกษาที่เน้นการเคารพความหลากหลายทางศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม

- เมื่อวันที่ 15-16 มกราคม 2551 นายมนตรีคุณ พงษ์พานิช ที่ปรึกษารัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงการต่างประเทศเป็นหัวหน้าคณะผู้แทนไทยเข้าร่วมการประชุมประจำปีครั้งแรกของกลุ่ม AoC ณ กรุงมาดริด ประเทศสเปน โดยหัวหน้าคณะผู้แทนไทยได้กล่าวถ้อยแถลงว่า รัฐบาลไทยจะให้การสนับสนุนทางการเงินต่อ

การดำเนินงานของ AoC ผ่านกองทุน AoC Trust Fund จำนวน 10,000 ดอลลาร์สหรัฐ และกล่าวถึง การดำเนินกิจกรรมต่างๆ ของไทยซึ่งสอดคล้องกับแผนอนุวัติการของ AoC

- ไทยได้ส่งคณะผู้แทนเข้าร่วมในการประชุม interfaith dialogue ในกรอบเอเชียแปซิฟิก โดยล่าสุด คณะผู้แทนไทยได้เข้าร่วมการประชุม Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue ครั้งที่ 4 เมื่อวันที่ 3-6 เมษายน 2551 ณ กรุงพนมเปญ ประเทศกัมพูชา โดยผู้เข้าร่วมประชุมเป็นผู้แทนจากประเทศต่างๆ ในภูมิภาคเอเชียแปซิฟิก 15 ประเทศ ได้แก่ ประเทศอาเซียน 10 ประเทศ ออสเตรเลีย นิวซีแลนด์ ฟิจิ ติมอร์-เลสเต และปาปัวนิวกินี โดยคณะผู้แทนแต่ละประเทศส่วนใหญ่ประกอบด้วยผู้แทนศาสนาต่างๆ ผู้แทนภาครัฐ และผู้แทนสื่อมวลชน สำหรับคณะผู้แทนไทยประกอบด้วยผู้แทนจากศาสนาต่างๆ 5 ศาสนาหลัก ผู้แทนกรมการศาสนา และผู้แทนสื่อมวลชน โดยมีรัฐบาลออสเตรเลีย นิวซีแลนด์ ฟิลิปปินส์และอินโดนีเซีย เป็นเจ้าภาพร่วม การประชุมดังกล่าวเป็นการประชุมต่อเนื่องจากการประชุม Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue ครั้งที่ 1 ที่เมืองยอร์กยาคาตาร์ อินโดนีเซีย ปี 2548 ครั้งที่ 2 ที่เมืองเซบู ฟิลิปปินส์ ปี 2549 และครั้งที่ 3 ที่เมืองไวตังกิ นิวซีแลนด์ ปี 2550 ที่ประชุมได้รับรองเอกสารการประชุมและกำหนด Action Plan ร่วมกัน (Phnom Penh Dialogue 2008 on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace and Harmony) โดยมุ่งเน้นไปที่การดำเนินการใน 3 มิติหลัก คือ Education and Capacity Building, Conflict Resolution and Capacity Building และ Grassroots Initiatives

Suggested Talking Points

- Thailand attaches great importance to interfaith dialogue and cooperation in the national, regional and international frameworks. In Thailand, religious leaders of different beliefs meet monthly to discuss issues of common interest and enhance cooperation as well as mutual understanding among people of different faiths. In addition, we recognize youths and the media's roles in strengthening harmonious society and generating trust and tolerance among people with diverse cultural backgrounds. We also encourage youths from southern provinces of Thailand to visit communities in other parts of the country to learn how people of various faiths, culture and religions live in peaceful co-existence.

- During 3-6 April this year, the Thai delegation attended the fourth Asia-Pacific Interfaith Dialogue Meeting in Phnom Penh. The delegation comprises religious leaders, as well as representatives from government agencies and the NGOs and the media. Through this meeting, participants had an opportunity to share among them best practices of interfaith activities and cooperation conducted in their countries. In addition, the meeting provides a useful forum for regional networking among the participants, which will benefit their future and common endeavour both in national and regional framework.

- Thailand urges all friendly countries to raise awareness of the international community about the importance of commonly shared values, regardless of faiths or religions; namely, non-violence, tolerance, mercifulness and moderation, which help create an environment conducive to peace, tolerance and understanding among people of different faiths and culture.

กองงานบริหารองค์การระหว่างประเทศ
กรมองค์การระหว่างประเทศ

23 พฤษภาคม 2551

การประชุม ASEM Interfaith Dialogue

การประชุม ASEM Interfaith Dialogue เป็นข้อริเริ่มของอินโดนีเซียและสหราชอาณาจักร ที่ได้ รับการรับรองจากที่ประชุมเจ้าหน้าที่อาวุโส ASEM (SOM) เมื่อวันที่ 6 ต.ค. 2547 ที่กรุงฮานอย

วัตถุประสงค์ของการประชุม เพื่อส่งเสริมความเข้าใจอันดีระหว่างความเชื่อ (faith) / ศาสนาต่างๆ ในเอเชียและยุโรป ตลอดจนส่งเสริมความร่วมมือเพื่อสกัดกั้นกลุ่มแนวความคิดรุนแรง โดยผู้เข้าร่วม การประชุมส่วนใหญ่ประกอบด้วย ผู้แทนจากภาครัฐ ผู้นำศาสนา นักวิชาการทางศาสนา สื่อมวลชน รวมทั้งผู้สังเกตการณ์จากองค์กรระหว่างประเทศที่เกี่ยวข้องด้วย เช่น OIC และ UNESCO

ประเทศผู้ร่วมอุปถัมภ์ (co-sponsor) ในการประชุมครั้งแรกเมื่อปี 2548 มี 8 ประเทศ และ 1 องค์กร¹ ในการประชุมครั้งที่ 2 ปี 2549 มี 11 ประเทศ² และในการประชุมครั้งที่ 3 เมื่อปี 2550 มี 14 ประเทศ³ โดยประเทศผู้ร่วมอุปถัมภ์จะมีบทบาทในการพิจารณาหัวข้อ รูปแบบ รายละเอียดต่างๆ และรับรองเอกสาร ของการประชุม รวมทั้งจะได้รับการพิจารณาเป็นลำดับแรกในการส่งผู้ดำเนินการประชุม (moderator) และ วิทยากร (panelist) เข้าร่วมในการประชุม ทั้งนี้ ไทยได้ร่วมอุปถัมภ์การประชุมฯ ตั้งแต่ ครั้งแรก เนื่องจากเห็น ว่า วัตถุประสงค์ของการประชุมสอดคล้องกับนโยบายของรัฐบาลที่สนับสนุน การส่งเสริมความเข้าใจอัน ดี และการอยู่ร่วมกันอย่างสมานฉันท์ของศาสนา / ความเชื่อต่างๆ รวมทั้งการมีเวทีหารือระหว่างวัฒนธรรม และอารยธรรมที่แตกต่างกัน

รูปแบบการหารือ แบ่งเป็นการประชุมเต็มคณะ) Plenary Session(และการประชุมคณะทำงาน (Working group 4 (กลุ่ม และมี drafting committee ซึ่งประเทศเจ้าภาพและประเทศ ผู้อุปถัมภ์ร่วม พิจารณาร่างเอกสารผลการประชุม เพื่อเสนอให้ที่ประชุมเต็มคณะรับรองให้ความเห็นชอบในช่วงปิดการ ประชุม

การประชุม ASEM Interfaith ครั้งที่ 1

อินโดนีเซียและสหราชอาณาจักรเป็นเจ้าภาพร่วมจัดขึ้นเมื่อวันที่ 21-22 ก.ค. 2548 ที่เมืองบาห์ลี โดยมี theme หลัก คือ “ Building Inter-Faith Harmony within the International Community” เน้นการให้เสรีภาพ ในการนับถือศาสนาและการให้ประชาชนได้รับสิทธิต่างๆ อย่างเท่าเทียมกันโดยไม่มี การเลือกปฏิบัติทาง ศาสนา

ผู้เข้าร่วมการประชุม ประกอบด้วย ผู้แทนจากภาครัฐ ผู้นำศาสนา และนักวิชาการทางศาสนาจากสมาชิก ASEM⁴ องค์กรการประชุมอิสลาม (Organization of Islamic Conference – OIC), คณะมนตรีแห่งสหภาพ ยุโรป (Council of the European Union), มูลนิธิเอเชีย-ยุโรป (Asia-Europe Foundation – ASEF), และ องค์กรการศึกษา วิทยาศาสตร์ และวัฒนธรรมแห่งสหประชาชาติ (UNESCO)

ผลการประชุม ที่ประชุมได้ให้การรับรอง Bali Declaration ซึ่งย้ำเจตนารมณ์ของประเทศสมาชิก ASEM ที่จะร่วมกับประชาคมโลกในการต่อต้านการใช้ความรุนแรงที่ใช้ศาสนาเป็นข้ออ้าง และเห็นชอบให้มีการหารือ ระหว่างศาสนาต่างๆ อย่างต่อเนื่องต่อไป นอกจากนี้ ได้ผนวกข้อเสนอแนะของที่ประชุมกลุ่มย่อย 4 กลุ่ม เกี่ยวกับบทบาทของวงการต่างๆ ในการส่งเสริมสมานฉันท์ทางศาสนา

¹ ไทย มาเลเซีย ฟิลิปปินส์ สิงคโปร์ เนเธอร์แลนด์ ออสเตรเลีย เดนมาร์ก สเปน และคณะกรรมการยุโรป

² ไทย เบลเยียม ฟินแลนด์ กรีซ ไอร์แลนด์ โปรตุเกส อินโดนีเซีย จีน เยอรมนี สาธารณรัฐเกาหลี และสหราชอาณาจักร

³ ไทย ออสเตรเลีย ไชปรัส เดนมาร์ก ฟินแลนด์ อินโดนีเซีย มาเลเซีย มองโกเลีย เนเธอร์แลนด์ ปากีสถาน ฟิลิปปินส์ สิงคโปร์ สเปน และ สหราชอาณาจักร

⁴ สมาชิก ASEM (ก่อนรับสมาชิกใหม่) มี 35 ประเทศและ 1 องค์กร ได้แก่ EU 25 ประเทศ อาเซียน 10 ประเทศ และคณะกรรมการ ยุโรป

บทบาทของไทย อธิบดีกรมสารนิเทศร่วมเป็นผู้ดำเนินการประชุม (moderator) ในการประชุมกลุ่มย่อย เรื่องการศึกษา และ ผศ. ดร.จรัญ มะลูลีม อาจารย์ประจำคณะรัฐศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยธรรมศาสตร์ร่วมเป็นวิทยากร (panelist) ในการประชุมกลุ่มย่อยเรื่อง “Barriers to Interfaith Harmony”

การประชุม ASEM Interfaith Dialogue ครั้งที่ 2

ไซปรัสและมาเลเซียเป็นเจ้าภาพร่วมจัดขึ้นเมื่อวันที่ 3-5 ก.ค. 2549 ที่เมือง Larnaca ไซปรัส โดยมี theme หลัก คือ “Interfaith understanding and cooperation for a peaceful world” เพื่อสานต่อการหารือ IFD ครั้งที่ 1 และเน้นการนำวัตถุประสงค์ของปฏิญญาบาห์ลีไปปฏิบัติและได้จัดทำแผนปฏิบัติการ Larnaca เพื่อให้เป็นแนวทางความร่วมมือระหว่างกันต่อไป

ผู้เข้าร่วมประชุม สมาชิก ASEM) ก่อนรับสมาชิกใหม่(จีน ญี่ปุ่น สาธารณรัฐเกาหลี ไทมาเนีย บัลแกเรีย สำนักเลขาธิการอาเซียน Holy See มุลินีอิเอเซีย-ยุโรป Arab League สภายุโรป และ UNESCO

ผลการประชุม ที่ประชุมรับรองเอกสารแผนปฏิบัติการ Larnaca (Action Plan) ภายใต้หัวข้อ “Interfaith Understanding and Cooperation for a Peaceful World” ซึ่งระบุแผนการดำเนินการเพื่อเสริมสร้างความเข้าใจระหว่างศาสนาต่างๆ บทบาทของสื่อมวลชนในการส่งเสริมการหารือระหว่างศาสนา และส่งเสริมให้สังคมที่มีความหลากหลายของศาสนาและเชื้อชาติสามารถอยู่ด้วยกันได้อย่างสันติ

บทบาทไทย พระอนิลมาน ธम्मสากิโย เป็นวิทยากรในการประชุมเต็มคณะ และนางสนธิสุดา เอกชัยร่วมเป็นวิทยากรในคณะทำงาน “Role of Media in Promoting IFD” ในขณะที่อธิบดีกรมยุโรป (หัวหน้าคณะ) ร่วมอภิปรายในคณะทำงาน “ Religion and Multi- ethnic Societies”

การประชุม ASEM Interfaith Dialogue ครั้งที่ 3

จีนและอิตาลีเป็นเจ้าภาพร่วมจัดขึ้นเมื่อวันที่ 21-18มิ.ย. 2550 ที่เมืองนานจิง จีน โดยมี theme หลัก คือ “Deepening Interfaith Dialogue for Peace, Development and Harmony” เพื่อเน้นความคืบหน้าในการดำเนินการของปฏิญญาบาห์ลีและแผนปฏิบัติการ Lanarca และต่อยอดความพยายามในการส่งเสริมความสามัคคีระหว่างศาสนาภายใน ASEM และนานาชาติประเทศ ผ่านหัวข้อในการหารือ เช่น พัฒนาการภายใต้โลกาภิวัตน์ สันติภาพและความมั่นคง การศึกษา และการอยู่ร่วมกันอย่างสมานฉันท์ของต่างความเชื่อ

ผู้เข้าร่วมประชุม สมาชิก ASEM⁵ Holy See มุลินีอิเอเซีย-ยุโรป OIC และ UN

ผลการประชุม ที่ประชุมรับรองเอกสารผลการประชุม Nanjing Chair Statement ที่สะท้อนผล การหารือให้เห็นถึงความสำคัญของความสมานฉันท์ของทุกภาคส่วน การมีส่วนร่วมของทุกกลุ่มความคิด การศึกษา และการเรียนรู้วัฒนธรรมอื่นว่า จะสามารถสร้างเสริมความเข้าใจอันดีและลดอคติทางศาสนา / ความเชื่อที่แตกต่างกันในสังคมได้ และได้มีการระดมสมองว่า ควรนำข้อเสนอแนะต่างๆ ไปปฏิบัติให้เป็นรูปธรรมอย่างไร

บทบาทไทย พระสุธีวรญาณ ร่วมเป็น panelist ในคณะทำงาน “Interfaith Dialogue and Peace” ผศ. ดร.เลขา ปิยะอัจฉริยะ ร่วมเป็น panelist ในคณะทำงาน “Interfaith Dialogue and the Promotion of Cultural and Education” ในขณะที่อธิบดีกรมยุโรป (หัวหน้าคณะ) ร่วมอภิปรายในคณะทำงาน “Interfaith Dialogue and Social Cohesion and Development”

⁵ สมาชิกใหม่อีก 8 ประเทศ และ 1 องค์การ คือ จีน ญี่ปุ่น สาธารณรัฐเกาหลี อินเดีย ปากีสถาน มองโกเลีย โรมาเนีย บัลแกเรีย และสำนักเลขาธิการอาเซียน (รวมสมาชิก ASEM ทั้งหมด 43 ประเทศและ 2 องค์การ)

การประชุม ASEM Interfaith Dialogue ครั้งที่ 4

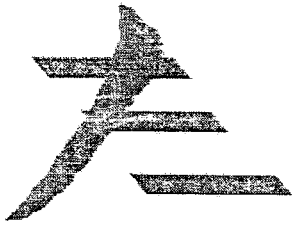
ในคราวนี้ ไทยได้เป็นเจ้าภาพร่วมกับเนเธอร์แลนด์จัดประชุม ASEM Interfaith Dialogue ครั้งที่ 4 ณ กรุงอัมสเตอร์ดัม ระหว่างวันที่ 3- 5 มิ.ย.2551 โดย รัฐมนตรีว่าการฯ ได้ เข้าร่วมในพิธีเปิดการประชุม ในฐานะประธานร่วม และไทยจะส่งผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิจำนวน 4 คน เป็น panellist คือ ดร.อาจอง ชุมสาย ณ อยุธยา รศ.ดร.สุวรรณา สถาอานันท์ รศ.ดร.ภัทรพร สิริกาญจน และนายदनัย จันท์เจ้าฉาย ทั้งนี้ การเป็นเจ้าภาพร่วมของไทยเกิดจากการที่ไทยเห็นว่า วัตถุประสงค์ของการประชุมมีความสอดคล้องกับนโยบายของรัฐบาลที่สนับสนุนการส่งเสริมความเข้าใจอันดีและการอยู่ร่วมกันอย่างสมานฉันท์ของศาสนา / ความเชื่อ / วัฒนธรรมต่างๆ

ความคาดหวังของการประชุมครั้งนี้ เพื่อแสดงให้เห็นว่า ถึงแม้ไทยจะเป็นประเทศที่ประชากรส่วนใหญ่นับถือศาสนาพุทธ แต่ไทยก็ให้ความเคารพสิทธิในการนับถือศาสนาอื่น และพระมหากษัตริย์ก็ทรงเป็นองค์อัครศาสนูปถัมภกของศาสนาพุทธ คริสต์ และอิสลาม ในการประชุมครั้งนี้ จะเสริมสร้างการแลกเปลี่ยนแนวทางปฏิบัติที่ดีจากนานาประเทศในการอยู่ร่วมกันอย่างสันติและสร้างสรรค์ ซึ่งวิทยากรผู้ทรงคุณวุฒิของไทยทั้ง 4 จะได้แลกเปลี่ยนประสบการณ์ที่ดีในการประชุมกลุ่มย่อย

Suggested talking points

- Thailand welcomes the opportunity to co-host the 4th ASEM Interfaith Dialogue with the Netherlands under the general theme of "Interfaith Dialogue in Practice: Sharing Best Practices" in Amsterdam, during 3 – 5 June 2008.
- Thailand hopes that we can achieve the primary objective of the Dialogue which is to encourage better understanding among religions by exchanging ideas and experiences to co-exist peacefully. Thailand supports the idea of "Unity in diversity," which led us to accept the Netherlands' proposal to co-host this important meeting.
- In addition to the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, we are enthusiastic in other interfaith frameworks, such as Conference on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace, Asia-Middle East Dialogue (AMED), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue, and Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations.

กองยุโรป 1 กรมยุโรป
กระทรวงการต่างประเทศ
15 พฤษภาคม 2551



THE FOURTH ASEM INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Asia-Europe Meeting 3-5 June 2008 | Amsterdam | The Netherlands

Amsterdam Statement on Interfaith Dialogue

We, the representatives of ASEM partners, reflecting various cultural, religious and faith heritages, gathering in Amsterdam, on 3-5 June 2008, at the Fourth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, hosted by the Kingdom of the Netherlands, co-hosted by the Kingdom of Thailand and co-sponsored by the Republic of Austria, the Kingdom of Belgium, the People's Republic of China, the Kingdom of Denmark, the European Commission, the Republic of Finland, the Republic of Indonesia, the Italian Republic, the Republic of Korea, Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Slovenia, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Spain, the Kingdom of Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, agreed on the following to further promote the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue.

1. We renewed our commitment to deepening and broadening the Interfaith Dialogue for the benefit of a peaceful and fruitful Asia-Europe relationship and underscored the importance of consolidating the Interfaith Dialogue as an annual ASEM event. We reaffirmed the Bali Declaration, the Larnaca Action Plan and the Nanjing Statement on Interfaith Dialogue, and expressed our appreciation for the progress made since the first meeting.
2. We underlined the importance of understanding, tolerance and respect for religious, non-religious and cultural diversity as integral for our well-being, stability, prosperity and peace and are determined to fulfil our responsibility to contribute to global efforts in promoting interfaith and intercultural understanding; in rejecting stereotyping and the use of violence in the name of religions, faiths or ideologies; in opposing extremism; and in preventing and combating terrorism, possibly also in the context of ASEM counter terrorism meetings. We also underline the importance of empirical scientific research and study of the actual functions of religions in society.
3. We recognised the fact that globalisation has increased interaction among different cultures, religions, and beliefs, heightening the need for greater cooperation and understanding among cultures, religions, and civilisations, and enrichment of globalisation with commonly shared values. We noted that the great diversity of our societies and the increased level of contacts

between civilisations should be seen as an opportunity rather than a threat. The increase in communication will help to foster greater understanding in facing the challenges of globalisation.

4. We were convinced of the positive role of the interfaith dialogue in improving awareness and understanding of common ethical standards and values shared by all humankind: in enhancing mutual understanding and respect through amicable interaction among adherents of faiths; in promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms; in encouraging social inclusion, equity, (gender) equality, justice, and tolerance in human interactions; in guaranteeing respect for faith heritage and diversity; in reducing the potential for antagonism, clashes, and violence; and in promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts.

5. We acknowledged that we can find admonitions to love and peace, and rejection of hatred and violence in all the world religions, and that we can find and share a set of common universal values. We urge the ASEM partners to respect freedom of religion or belief and take necessary actions to combat intolerance, discrimination, hostility and violence based on religion or belief.

6. We took note of the valuable contributions of various initiatives and their results at the national, regional and international level to promote tolerance, understanding, cooperation, solidarity and respect for diversity of culture, belief or religion such as the UN Alliance of Civilizations and the Fourth Asia-Pacific Regional Interfaith Dialogue held in Phnom Penh from 3 to 6 April 2008. We took note of the adoption by the UN General Assembly of its resolution 62/90 entitled "Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace", which declares 2010 as the International Year for the Rapprochements of Cultures, including the organisation of appropriate events on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, understanding and cooperation for peace, such as the 2007 high-level dialogue of the UN General assembly with the civil society, and welcomes the designation of a focal unit in the UN Secretariat to assist the Secretary General to effectively achieve its mandate to ensure the systematic and organizational follow-up of all interreligious, intercultural and intercivilisational matters within the United Nations system and overall coordination and coherence in its interreligious, intercultural and intercivilisational dialogue and cooperation efforts. We appreciate the outcome of the First Alliance of Civilizations Forum in Madrid on 15-16 January 2008, in particular the establishment of an Alliance of Civilizations Media Fund and a Global Youth Employment Initiative.

7. We acknowledged that, in achieving the abovementioned goals, a multidimensional approach is necessary. We believe that success in combating terrorism and religious intolerance in the long term will be highly determined by the success in empowering and strengthening the voice and efforts of those who proclaim tolerance in matters relating to religion or belief. We therefore urge governments to actively facilitate interfaith and intercultural dialogues, particularly at the regional and inter-regional levels. The ASEM Interfaith Dialogue serves as part of the intercultural dialogue, which in turn is part of a much broader dialogue between Europe and Asia. As we renew our commitment to interfaith dialogue, we also encourage and support dialogue in other settings.

8. This year we celebrate the Sixtieth Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and reconfirm our commitment to the upholding, promotion and protection of the human

rights of the individuals, including the right to freedom of thought, freedom of expression, conscience, religion and belief, as expressed in the Universal Declaration.

9. In four working groups, under the theme 'Interfaith Dialogue in Practice: Sharing Best Practices,' we discussed best practices in the fields of interfaith dialogue and poverty reduction, religious education, communication in the digital world and government policies.

Interfaith Dialogue and Poverty Reduction

10. In the working group on interfaith dialogue and poverty reduction, we dealt with questions like what role faith-based organisations and communities can play in poverty reduction and the narrowing of economic gaps and which lessons can be learned from previous experiences.

11. Faith-based organizations can contribute to achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals by drawing on their social capital in terms of people's trust, religious and humanitarian motivation, and solidarity with one's neighbour in need, regardless of his/her faith and conviction. They are in a special position to reach out to the poorest members in the community and to mobilize needed resources at all levels.

12. Faith-based organizations can also provide the governments at national and local level with an integral framework that goes beyond material benefits and encompasses, amongst others, the spiritual dimension. Through concrete actions many-faith based organizations and religious leaders (male and female) -in cooperation with governments, other civil society groups and businesses- also help address immediate needs of people. They also provide the elements for sustainable development through values formation and empowerment.

13. Interfaith dialogue-in-action programs among religious communities help promote a culture of peace as a precondition for anti-poverty measures to take place. We call on faith-based organizations to underline the importance of building new networks and actively contribute to bridge traditional gridlines.

Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Education

14. In the working group on interfaith dialogue and religious education, we discussed the role of comparative studies of different religions in finding common values and promoting understanding and identified best practices in religious teachings, as well as discussed their universal applicability.

15. We stressed the importance of knowledge and the necessity of deepening our mutual understanding, as well as finding our commonly shared values. Therefore, training, formation and studies are the way to prepare students, experts, teachers and researchers in religious education to avoid misinterpretations of religions and faiths. We underlined the fact that experience, practice, action and programmes are needed to achieve such goals.

16. We realised the need to spell out basic principles that are the ground, on which to build a continuous process of understanding within the context of plurality, diversity and differences.

Hence, policies, strategies and methods of integration, participation and interaction, coming from all sectors, are essential in addressing the issues of religious education, civil liberties and human dignity. We also realised that there are tensions between nationality, citizenship and religion and that need to be overcome.

17. In preparing courses and curricula, we recognised the significance of expertise, cooperation and involvement of relevant stakeholders. We also understood that religious education is not only conducive to conflict resolution, but is also a tool that helps to build community awareness and contributes to the constant harmony in varied religious and cultural settings. We realised the role of the family in religious education.

Interfaith Dialogue and Communications in the Digital World

18. In the working group on interfaith dialogue and communications in the digital world, we clarified the role of communication in the prevention of conflicts caused by different faiths and explored how interfaith websites report on the interfaith dialogue.

19. We want to emphasize the need for accurate communication in preventing conflicts caused by different cultural or religious backgrounds. Such communication requires the resolve of all parties involved to exchange timely, relevant, credible, inclusive and unbiased information.

20. Bearing in mind our shared responsibility in the prevention of conflicts, we want to maximise the use of digital media in conjunction with traditional forms of media. We call on the international community to facilitate the building of capacity in using and accessing electronic communication. Furthermore, we recognize the value of face-to-face interaction to communication.

21. We take note of and encourage the implementation of the fourteen proposals of the ASEF Journalists' Colloquium on how to use the media in promoting mutual understanding and respect within a pluralistic society.

Interfaith Dialogue and Government Policies

22. In the working group on interfaith dialogue and government policies, we looked back and forward on the implementation of the outcomes of the interfaith dialogue process by national governments and asked ourselves the question of how governments can show respect for religious and cultural diversity in practice.

23. We noted that all ASEM-governments want to engage with faith communities as an important part of wider civil society. The working group recognised the value of sharing the experience of different countries in addressing these issues and the possibilities for sharing best practices, while acknowledging the diversity between different countries.

24. We recognised the importance for governments to deal on equal terms with different religions. We identified three strands of engagement; (a) government/faith-communities; (b) interfaith; (c) intrafaith. It is also important to recognize the need to engage, not only with communities of religious faith but also with communities of other conviction. Our observations

apply to approaches both at national and local level where many of the practical issues involved have to be resolved:

- (a) In pursuing their responsibilities governments need to engage with faith-communities, who are able to help with the management of social change and with the promotion of cohesion. Faith-communities wish to influence government policies and are an important source of core values for societies. There is a need for well-structured consultation arrangements for this engagement, which needs to be a two-way process, respecting the different roles of governments and faith-communities. The agenda of this engagement concerns social issues rather than theological ones.
- (b) It is important for governments to encourage and support the process of interfaith dialogue between faith communities. The task of taking forward this interfaith dialogue is essentially one for religious communities themselves to pursue, but governments can play a role in encouraging the initiation of this dialogue in an atmosphere of mutual respect. Faith communities need to have good arrangements for this engagement with each other.
- (c) Governments will usually avoid intervention in intrafaith issues, but may need to become involved, for example in order to identify partners with whom to engage.

We are pleased with the outcomes of this Fourth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue and we are dedicated to ensure a timely and effective implementation of the proposed actions. We recognise the importance of sharing best practices within the framework of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, including the possibility of the provision of voluntary briefings, and will continue this process in next meetings.

We congratulate the Kingdom of the Netherlands for hosting, together with the Kingdom of Thailand, this Fourth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, furthering and continuing the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue as an annual ASEM event. We express our particular appreciation for the hospitality rendered by the city of Amsterdam, a living example of a city of diverse faiths and cultures. We thank all co-sponsors for making this dialogue possible and contributing to its success.

We also appreciate the valuable contribution of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). We will be informed in due time which country in Asia will host the Fifth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in 2009. We welcome the offer of the Kingdom of Spain to host the Sixth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in 2010.

ASEM Interfaith Dialogue

Suggested Talking Points

Thailand, is a country with many diverse cultures. There is a mixture of various ethnicities, including Thai, Chinese, Malay, Indian, Mon, Khmer, and Laotian among many others. Religions and faiths play a very important role in the life of the Thai people, because they serve as the major moral force of Thai families and communities, and contributed to the mould of free-will and form tolerant individuals. Under the Thai Constitution, whether you are a Buddhist, a Muslim, a Christian, a Hindu, a Sikh, or a person of any other religion, one will possess the freedom to exercise and practice your devotion. **His Majesty the King is the patron of all the religions and faiths in our nation, which have made possible for the people of Thailand to live together in peace and harmony amidst rich diversity of beliefs.**

In Thailand the harmony among cultures and faiths has been achieved through reconciliation and community development. It is quite an ordinary to spot mosques, temples, and churches situated in proximity from one another. Thus, we believe that interfaith and inter-civilisational dialogues are not just a vision, but **a fact of daily life throughout the country.** Against such background, Thailand also shares concerns of the international community over the trend of radicalisation and the spread of extremism across boundaries. Religious faiths and beliefs are being distorted and exercised by activists as a pretext to gain adherents as well as a support for violence across regions. We therefore need to triumph hearts and minds of the people and put in place effective mechanisms to ensure peace and understanding among us.

We are confident that the local communities are key locations, where faith battles are lost and won, and the war against violence decided. Community organisations thus play an important role in enhancing interfaith dialogues at the local level. In our view, it is therefore crucial to promote such organisations and engage the local community with all stakeholders, such as, religious and community leaders, local agencies, private sector, media, NGOs, and the civil society.

Then, in consultation with various religious organisations, community-level activities could be organised to promote such mutual understanding and harmony between all faiths and ethnicity in a bottom-up approach.

Once these interfaith activities revolve around the common goals and focus on shared concerns, increasing tolerance and more understanding will create cultural immunity against violence, where people listen to others' viewpoints and together find joint solutions. In chorus, non-violent means of solving conflicts would also be promoted alongside as a part of peaceful resolution. **This means that cultural diversity will no longer be an obstacle to harmony, but with education to respect each other and welcome unique qualities of each faith group, cultural diversity will instead become a means to help promote better understanding among all the stakeholders.**

As part of Thailand's commitment and continued efforts in fostering interfaith dialogue, especially through our younger generations, **The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Thailand in collaboration with the other government agencies concerned will host the ASEM Interfaith Cultural Youth Camp Project for ASEM partners by September 2008. We will finalise the proposal soon and will distribute it through the ASEM SOM coordinators.** The Youth Camp Project will provide a forum for our European and Asian youths to get to know each other through participating in the three-day programme visiting different faith communities and religious sites, joining local youth activities in the relaxing atmosphere and sharing their views in the presentation and group discussions.

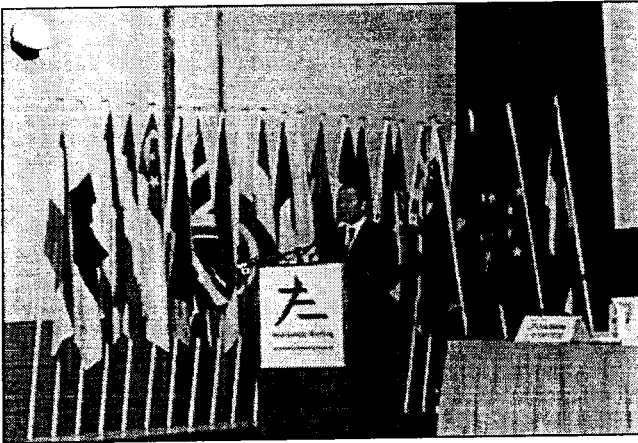
กองยุโรป 1 กรมยุโรป
กระทรวงการต่างประเทศ
10 มิถุนายน 2551

เมื่อวันที่ 4 มิถุนายน 2551 นายพลล ปัทมะ รัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงการต่างประเทศ และนาย Maxime Verhagen รัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงการต่างประเทศเนเธอร์แลนด์ เป็นประธานร่วมในพิธีเปิดการประชุมในกรอบอาเซียน ว่าด้วยการหารือระหว่างความเชื่อ ครั้งที่ 4 (the Fourth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue Meeting) ซึ่งจัดขึ้น ณ กรุงอันสเตอร์ดัม ภายใต้หัวข้อ "Interfaith Dialogue in Practice: Sharing Best Practices"

June 5, 2008

เมื่อวันที่ 4 มิถุนายน 2551 นายพลล ปัทมะ รัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงการต่างประเทศ และนาย Maxime Verhagen รัฐมนตรีว่าการกระทรวงการต่างประเทศเนเธอร์แลนด์ เป็นประธานร่วมในพิธีเปิดการประชุมในกรอบอาเซียน ว่าด้วยการหารือระหว่างความเชื่อ ครั้งที่ 4 (the Fourth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue Meeting) ซึ่งจัดขึ้น ณ กรุงอันสเตอร์ดัม ภายใต้หัวข้อ "Interfaith Dialogue in Practice: Sharing Best Practices"

โอกาสนี้ รัฐมนตรีว่าการฯ ได้ย้ำถึงความจำเป็นในการค้นหาแนวทางในการส่งเสริมความเคารพและการยอมรับต่อความแตกต่างทางศาสนาและวัฒนธรรม ซึ่งจะนำไปสู่วัฒนธรรมแห่งสันติภาพในที่สุด นอกจากนี้ ยิ่งกล่าวถึงความสำคัญในการแปลงการหารือระหว่างความเชื่อให้เป็นผลในทางปฏิบัติ โดยเน้นที่วิธีการนำการหารือดังกล่าวไปขยายผลอย่างเป็นรูปธรรม และการส่งเสริมการแพร่ขยายของแนวคิด ปรัชญา และประสบการณ์ที่สร้างสรรค์ซึ่งนำไปประยุกต์ใช้ต่อไป



รัฐมนตรีว่าการฯ ได้เล่าถึงประสบการณ์ของไทยว่า คนไทยต่างเชื้อชาติต่างศาสนา ได้อาศัยอยู่ร่วมกันอย่างสันติสุขตลอดมา ซึ่งเสถียรภาพในการนับถือศาสนาได้รับการคุ้มครองโดยกฎหมาย และที่สำคัญก็คือ พระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัวทรงเป็นองค์อัครศาสนูปถัมภกของศาสนาทุกศาสนาในประเทศไทย



อย่างไรก็ตาม ประเทศไทยยังต้องเผชิญกับความท้าทายต่างๆ โดยเฉพาะในพื้นที่ภาคใต้ของไทย ซึ่งความแตกต่างทางวัฒนธรรมได้ถูกนำมาใช้เมื่อโดยผู้ที่ต้องการให้เกิดความแตกแยก ในกรณีนี้ รัฐบาลไทยได้ดำเนินนโยบายที่เห็นความสามัคคีเห็นในการแก้ปัญหาดังกล่าว โดยยึดแนวทาง "เข้าใจ เข้าถึง พัฒนา" ของพระบาทสมเด็จพระเจ้าอยู่หัว ซึ่งรัฐมนตรีว่าการฯ ได้เน้นถึงประเด็นที่สำคัญ ได้แก่ 1) ผู้นำการเมือง ผู้นำศาสนา และผู้นำชุมชน มีบทบาทหลักในการส่งเสริมการยอมรับความแตกต่างด้านวัฒนธรรม รวมถึงเสถียรภาพในการนับถือศาสนาและลัทธิความเชื่อต่างๆ 2) การส่งเสริมการหารือระหว่างความเชื่อและความเข้าใจระหว่างกันจำเป็นต้องอาศัยความเป็นหุ้นส่วนของแต่ละภาคส่วน 3) การเผยแพร่ข้อมูลที่ถูกต้องเกี่ยวกับปรัชญาและคำสอนของแต่ละศาสนา รวมถึงการส่งเสริมความเคารพระหว่างศาสนา ซึ่งต้องกระทำอย่างต่อเนื่อง 4) การวางระบบการศึกษาและกิจกรรมนอกเวลาเรียน เพื่อส่งเสริมให้เยาวชนรู้จักการมีเมตตาและการให้อภัย ซึ่งรัฐบาลไทยได้ให้ความสำคัญโดยการจะเป็นเจ้าภาพจัดการประชุม the ASEM Interfaith Cultural Youth Camp Project สำหรับเยาวชนจากประเทศสมาชิก ASEM ในเดือนกันยายน ศกนี้ และ 5) การวางรากฐานทางเทคโนโลยี อาทิ ระบบกระจายภาพและเสียงผ่านดาวเทียมและอินเทอร์เน็ต เพื่อสนับสนุนการหารือระหว่างความเชื่อ โดยทุกคนสามารถติดต่อสื่อสารกันได้ตลอดเวลา รวมถึงได้รับข้อมูลที่ถูกต้องและทันสมัย อันจะช่วยให้เกิดความเข้าใจระหว่างกันได้มากขึ้นด้วย



รัฐมนตรีว่าการฯ ได้เรียกร้องให้ตีประชุมแปลงผลของการหารือให้เป็นแนวทางปฏิบัติที่เป็นรูปธรรม และ สามารถก่อให้เกิดผลที่สร้างสรรค์ และเชื่อต่อ "ความเป็นหนึ่งเดียวกันบนพื้นฐานความแตกต่าง" ในสถานการณ์ของโลกปัจจุบันได้

ทั้งนี้ โยคินกอนเจเนอ รัฐมนตรีว่าการฯ ได้เป็นเจ้าภาพเลี้ยงอาหารกลางวันกับประธานการประชุม ซึ่งเขากล่าวว่าอาหารไทยให้บริการแล้ว ผู้เข้าร่วมงานฯ นี้จะได้เพลิดเพลินไปกับการแสดงทางวัฒนธรรมของไทยด้วย

Press Release

- Welcoming Remarks by H.E. Mr. Noppadon Pattama, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, at the Opening Session of The Fourth Asia-Europe Meeting Interfaith Dialogue, 4 June 2008, Amsterdam

June 5, 2008, 3:26 am

Your Excellency Mr. Maxime Verhagen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands,
Mr. Job Cohen, Mayor of Amsterdam,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates and Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As co-host of the Fourth ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, I wish to join Minister Verhagen in extending a warm welcome to the Heads of delegations and all other distinguished participants.

On my own part, let me take this opportunity to express my appreciation to the Netherlands for the warm hospitality and excellent arrangements for this important meeting.

It is apt indeed that we meet here "face to face" to talk "faith to faith" – in this vibrant, cosmopolitan city of Amsterdam – a city where various cultures and faiths intersect.

We may have come from different cultures, religions and beliefs. But we have a common conviction and a shared faith.

- A conviction to search for approaches to nurture and encourage mutual respect for religious and cultural diversity, for tolerance and, ultimately, for a culture of peace.
- A faith in the good of dialogue: the dialogue among civilisations, cultures and faiths.

So, the real challenge before us is not only to engage in dialogue. We already have a growing number of worthy and mutually reinforcing initiatives – among regions and within regions.

Our challenge is, rather, how to translate our dialogue – our words and ideas – into action; how to implement interfaith dialogue in concrete terms; how to spread the constructive ideas, wisdoms and experiences we share and put them to good use.

Each country, each society, have their own stories to tell – stories of how they cope with diversity.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to tell you a story about a country I know best: Thailand.

Thailand, while predominantly Thai and Buddhist, also has different cultures and ethnic mixes.

- Thais have always lived peacefully side-by-side with Chinese, Malays, Indians, Mons, Khmers, and Laotians; as do Buddhists with Muslims, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs.
- Religion and faith have traditionally played a very important role in Thai people's lives and contributed to moulding Thais as free-spirited and tolerant individuals.

Tolerance has been instilled in our conscience. Freedom to follow any religion or faith has been guaranteed by law in our country since the Proclamation of Religious Toleration in 1878 – over a hundred years ago. Coupled with the fact that His Majesty the King of Thailand is the patron of all major faiths in the country – our people have been able to live together in peace and harmony.

Indeed, it is common in Thailand to spot mosques, tempies and churches situated side-by-side or in proximity to one another.

In sum, interfaith and inter-cultural dialogues are not just what we envision. They are what we practice as part of our way of life, even subconsciously.

We in Thailand consider ourselves blessed to have no substantive religion-, faith- or ethnic-based conflict.

That said, we do face some related challenges, as experienced in our deep South. There, cultural differences have at times been deviously exploited and portrayed by bad and intolerant elements into religious conflicts, sporadically resulting in loss of life and property.

To address them effectively, we are pursuing a policy of reconciliation based on His Majesty the King's approach – to "understand, reach out and develop". This has helped ensure that security and development efforts are adapted to local conditions, way of life and popular beliefs. I have the pleasure to inform you all that this is working well. Yet, it will take time to completely accomplish our objective.

Nevertheless, we share with our friends the concern over the trend of radicalisation and spread of extremism across boundaries. We are concerned about religious faiths and dogmatic beliefs being distorted and misused, about misperceptions leading to inter-religious and intercultural tension.

That is why Thailand has co-sponsored the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue from the beginning and gladly co-hosts its fourth meeting today. We wish to share our story and to learn from you.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to underline some points as we continue our dialogue:

First, leadership is crucial.

Political, religious and community leaders have a key role to play in promoting respect for cultural diversity and freedom of religion and faith. They have to speak out strongly and continuously in support of moderation, peace and harmony.

Second, promoting interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding requires a multi-stakeholder partnership.

Because the question of faith and values goes to the very core of our respective societies. Everyone – from government, civil society and private sector to local communities and organizations and ordinary citizens – must be involved and contribute. We should also solicit support from artists, entertainers, sportsmen and other celebrities and personalities who can serve as role models for others.

Third, we must continue to disseminate correct interpretation of principles and teachings of our respective religions and faiths, while also promoting respect for other religions and faiths.

Because extremist elements tend to play on misperceptions to instigate hatred and incite violence, we must prevent our

beliefs from being distorted. We must encourage more and more voices of moderation and tolerance. And we must also recognize that diversity exists even within a religion.

Here, I wish to emphasize the crucial role of local communities. This is the level where faith figures most actively in our people's daily lives.

Local leaders should be encouraged to organize community-level activities to promote tolerance, non-violence, mutual understanding and harmony among all faiths and ethnicities within their localities.

At the same time, governments and local authorities also have the responsibility to formulate and implement economic and social policies that promote equality, dignity and justice among different groups within our societies. This will lessen the sense of discontent and marginalization which could make certain groups vulnerable to extremists' manipulation.

Fourth, we must focus on our young people.

Through education and extra-curricular activities, we can instil love, forgiveness and compassion in our children. It is through these values that we hope they will grow up proud of their own beliefs while being appreciative and tolerant towards those of other faiths.

Educators and teachers must also be actively engaged in interfaith efforts, including in designing curricula that promote understanding and respect for different cultures and beliefs.

Here, I wish to announce Thailand's intention to host this September the ASEM Interfaith Cultural Youth Camp Project for ASEM partners. This Project will provide a forum for European and Asian youths to get to know each other through a three-day programme which include visits to different communities of faiths and religious sites, participation in local youth activities and discussions.

I hope that you will support our initiative as another practical approach to promote dialogue and to share best practices.

Turning to my fifth and final point, we have available technological assets which we can mobilize in support of interfaith dialogue. With tools like satellite broadcasting and the Internet, more people can be reached. And with such tools, they should not only be able to stay in touch but also have access to accurate and timely information that should help them understand each other better.

Here, the media – through their pages, voices, pictures and websites and with adequate discretion on sensitivity– can contribute significantly in enhancing respect and understanding among different cultures.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This year's theme "Interfaith Dialogue in Practice: Sharing Best Practices" underscores our common goals to promote – in concrete ways – mutual respect and better understanding among different faiths and beliefs.

It is incumbent upon all of us to move beyond the question of "how to" to "what can be done" so that we may take action. My motto is "action speaks louder than words". I believe we have enough words. It's time for us to act, and act now!

Colleagues, I also hope this meeting will provide us with a chance not only to examine the right courses of action, but also to share views on what should be avoided.

And although there is no "one size fits all" solution or approach when dealing with beliefs and faiths, I believe we will benefit from one another's stories and experiences, good and bad.

Finally, I wish the Dialogue every success in producing a constructive outcome to foster "Unity in Diversity" in today's multi-dimensional and challenging world.

Different we may be. But with our determination and unity of purpose, we shall overcome these differences, together. This is why we are here, because we have faith in this Interfaith Dialogue.

I HAVE FAITH. And I trust you do too.

Thank you.

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UNITED NATIONS
62nd Session of the General Assembly

High-level Dialogue
on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace

Statement by

H.E.

Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation

João Gomes Cravinho

on behalf of the European Union

New York, 4 and 5 October 2007

Please check against delivery

Distinguished President of the General Assembly,

Mr. Secretary General,

Dear Representatives of Member States,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Portugal's role as EU Presidency, I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union. We welcome this High-level dialogue on Interreligious and Intercultural Understanding and Cooperation for Peace, including the interactive hearing with representatives of Civil Society to take place this afternoon. We believe that Europe has a key role to play in the promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural understanding along with other regions of the world.

In the history of international relations, the challenge for so long has been the peaceful co-existence of different value systems. Over the centuries, many different ways to avoid conflict have been sought. One solution is for nations to share peace and prosperity through dialogue, understanding and tolerance.

Mutual understanding does not entail imposing one's values or culture or faith on others. It involves respecting different values and beliefs based on the awareness of common political, economic, social, ecological and cultural challenges we face in an increasingly global and vulnerable world. It means protecting and promoting all human rights and fundamental freedoms which were several times reaffirmed as universal; it entails freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief; it requires an open mind and the willingness to understand and the pluralism of cultures, religions and beliefs.

Beyond these attitudes and intercultural competences, we must focus on concrete cooperation and common actions. Pluralism in European Society and the legal, political and social conditions for coping with it have been a major factor for prosperity and development. We must enhance mutual understanding on the basis of our firm conviction that human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of expression, are the common ground on which we stand.

Dialogue will only succeed if we make sure that both men and women's experiences and expertise are integrated effectively into our intercultural and interreligious dialogue; into social and political initiatives of conflict prevention at all levels. Dialogue will only bear fruit if we enable our youth to respond actively and positively to the challenges of our pluralistic and vulnerable world.

The European Union is founded on the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law. These principles are common to all Member States and the EU is ready to play its part in this process.

A common understanding and acceptance of core values among Europeans of all social, cultural and religious backgrounds is crucial for peaceful cohabitation and social cohesion. In consequence, the EU applies its core values and principles in all of its policies and promotes these within Europe and beyond.

The European Union's integration and non-discrimination policies are guided by the following principles; the principle of equality before the law; the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of any ground and the fight against racism; respect for cultural, linguistic and religious diversity; and equality between men and women.

The EU promotes freedom of religion and belief throughout European societies and beyond, including through the media. The resolution introduced at this Assembly by the EU on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and of discrimination based on religion or belief, adopted last year by consensus, is but one example of our commitment to guarantee this fundamental freedom.

European culture has been enriched by outside influences throughout its history and European culture and ideas have had a profound influence on many cultures throughout the world. Europeans of various social, cultural and religious backgrounds contribute to the diversity and prosperity of Europe today. Today's European identity is a multiple one, reflecting manifold and pluralist influences, including those of migration and globalisation. Europe faces the challenges of continuously developing and strengthening the dialogue with its various communities, ethnic minorities and numerous religious communities, including the very positive engagement with the Muslims of and in Europe. The European Union views its political and legal framework as essential to ensure social peace and cohesion and to marginalise radicalism and extremism on all sides. Freedom of religion, non-discrimination and recognition of religious communities in particular is a crucial precondition for any successful dialogue.

The importance of inter-civilisational understanding is strongly reflected in European Union policy and action. The EU is active in promoting intercultural and interreligious understanding, both within Europe and with international partners. I would like to give to you some examples of initiatives strongly supported by the European Union, which aim to promote a more peaceful and cohesive society.

The Euromed Barcelona Process provides a framework for dialogue between the European Union and its Mediterranean partners. This established the Anna Lindh Euro-Mediterranean Foundation for the Dialogue between cultures. The Foundation's main objective is to bring people and organizations from both shores of the Mediterranean closer to each other and to help bridging the gap between them. Particular importance is given to the development of human resources, while youth is the main target group. Another priority is the promotion of tolerance among people by furthering exchanges between members of the diverse civil societies. The Foundation, which facilitates the coordination of 35 national networks, has programmes in the fields of media, education, women and youth.

With a membership of 43 Asian and European states, the Asia Europe meeting (ASEM) is uniquely placed to foster links between Asia and Europe through Interfaith and Intercultural dialogue.

ASEM Interfaith Dialogues have helped to build mutual understanding between Asians and Europeans in the fields of interfaith and inter-religious relations. The third ASEM Interfaith Dialogue was held in Nanjing, China in June this year. Together with the two previous meetings, in Bali, Indonesia in 2005, and in Larnaca, Cyprus in 2006, they addressed the relations of interfaith dialogue to peace, justice, compassion and tolerance. The Nanjing Statement issued at the end of the dialogue reflected the role of interfaith dialogue on globalisation, peace, social cohesion and development and cultural and educational cooperation. A fourth dialogue in Amsterdam is scheduled for 2008.

Additionally the ASEM partnership has achieved substantial results in boosting cultural, educational, intellectual and people to people exchanges, expanding and facilitating research networking and promoting cultural diversity.

Europe is a strong supporter of The Alliance of Civilisations Initiative. It was proposed by the President of the Spanish Government, in 2005 and co-sponsored by the Turkish Prime Minister. In April 2007, the UN Secretary General appointed Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal, as his High Representative for the Alliance of Civilisations. The Alliance, with the endorsement of the United Nations SG, intends to galvanise collective action across diverse societies in order to combat extremism, overcome cultural and social barriers between mainly the Western and predominantly Muslim worlds, and to reduce the tensions and polarisation between societies which differ in religious and cultural values.

It is our understanding that, in order to most effectively move forward the agenda of dialogue and tolerance, the Alliance of Civilisations and other UN initiatives for enhancing dialogue and mutual understanding should be carried out in a coordinated, coherent, and complementary manner, within the existing institutional framework. The EU sees the Alliance of Civilizations

as a 'flagship initiative' in this area and we would see it as a potential "focal point" for the increasing number of initiatives. Through a better coordination of initiatives rather than their proliferation, we improve our chances of making a difference.

Turning again to Europe, the Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue is expected to be adopted in November 2007. On its website devoted entirely to the role of Intercultural Dialogue, the Council states its firm belief that "Dialogue between cultures, which is the oldest and most fundamental mode of democratic conversation, is an antidote to rejection and violence. Its objective is to enable us to live together peacefully and constructively in a multicultural world, and to develop a sense of community and belonging."

Finally in October 2005, the European Commission proposed that 2008 be declared the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. With a budget of EURO 10 million, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue will present a wide variety of enriching concrete projects that will be implemented in the framework of EU programs and other Community actions. The Year of Intercultural Dialogue will encourage the mobilisation of civil society and actors at the European, national and local levels. Culture, education, youth, sport and citizenship will be the focus of activities.

To conclude, it is possible that the term "inter-civilisational or intercultural dialogue" might be construed as an endorsement of the idea that humanity is divided by monolithic and entirely distinguishable "civilisations". But this is far from accurate. In reality the boundary lines between cultures are mostly unclear. Over time and space, different cultures influence each other profoundly. Most civilisations harbour people of different cultures who coexist peacefully. The European Union is committed to promoting dialogue and understanding, and striving for universal appreciation of different religions, cultures and beliefs.

Thank you Mr. President.

UNESCO
UNIVERSAL DECLARATION
ON CULTURAL
DIVERSITY

Adopted by the 31st Session
of the General Conference
of UNESCO
PARIS, 2 NOVEMBER 2001

"The cultural wealth of the world is its diversity in dialogue"

The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted unanimously in a most unusual context. It came in the wake of the events of 11 September 2001, and the UNESCO General Conference, which was meeting for its 31st session, was the first ministerial-level meeting to be held after those terrible events. It was an opportunity for States to reaffirm their conviction that intercultural dialogue is the best guarantee of peace and to reject outright the theory of the inevitable clash of cultures and civilizations.

Such a wide-ranging instrument is a first for the international community. It raises cultural diversity to the level of "the common heritage of humanity", "as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature" and makes its defence an ethical imperative indissociable from respect for the dignity of the individual.

The Declaration aims both to preserve cultural diversity as a living, and thus renewable treasure that must not be perceived as being unchanging heritage but as a process guaranteeing the survival of humanity; and to prevent segregation and fundamentalism which, in the name of cultural differences, would sanctify those differences and so counter the message of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The Universal Declaration makes it clear that each individual must acknowledge not only otherness in all its forms but also the plurality of his or her own identity, within societies that are themselves plural. Only in this way can cultural diversity be preserved as an adaptive process and as a capacity for expression, creation and innovation. The debate between those countries which would like to defend cultural goods and services "which, as vectors of identity, values and meaning, must not be treated as mere commodities or consumer goods", and those which would hope to promote cultural rights has thus been surpassed, with the two approaches brought together by the Declaration, which has highlighted the causal link uniting two complementary attitudes.

One cannot exist without the other. The Declaration, accompanied by the main lines of an action plan, can be an outstanding tool for development, capable of humanizing globalization.

Of course, it lays down not instructions but general guidelines to be turned into ground-breaking policies by Member States in their specific contexts, in partnership with the private sector and civil society.

This Declaration, which sets against inward-looking fundamentalism the prospect of a more open, creative and democratic world, is now one of the founding texts of the new ethics promoted by UNESCO in the early twenty-first century. My hope is that one day it may acquire the same force as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Koïchiro Matsuura
Director-General

THE GENERAL CONFERENCE,

Committed to the full implementation of the human rights and fundamental freedoms proclaimed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other universally recognized legal instruments, such as the two International Covenants of 1966 relating respectively to civil and political rights and to economic, social and cultural rights,

Recalling that the Preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO affirms "that the wide diffusion of culture, and the education of humanity for justice and liberty and peace are indispensable to the dignity of man and constitute a sacred duty which all the nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern",

Further recalling Article I of the Constitution, which assigns to UNESCO among other purposes that of recommending "such international agreements as may be necessary to promote the free flow of ideas by word and image",

Referring to the provisions relating to cultural diversity and the exercise of cultural rights in the international instruments enacted by UNESCO,¹

Reaffirming that culture should be regarded as the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of society or a social group, and that it encompasses, in addition to art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions and beliefs,²

Noting that culture is at the heart of contemporary debates about identity, social cohesion, and the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Affirming that respect for the diversity of cultures, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation, in a climate of mutual trust and understanding are among the best guarantees of international peace and security.

Aspiring to greater solidarity on the basis of recognition of cultural diversity, of awareness of the unity of humankind, and of the development of intercultural exchanges.

Considering that the process of globalization, facilitated by the rapid development of new information and communication technologies, though representing a challenge for cultural diversity, creates the conditions for renewed dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

Aware of the specific mandate which has been entrusted to UNESCO, within the United Nations system, to ensure the preservation and promotion of the fruitful diversity of cultures.

Proclaims the following principles and adopts the present Declaration:

1. Among which, in particular, the Florence Agreement of 1950 and its Nairobi Protocol of 1976, the Universal Copyright Convention of 1952, the Declaration of the Principles of International Cultural Cooperation of 1966, the Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property of 1970, the Convention for the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage of 1972, the Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice of 1978, the Recommendation concerning the Status of the Artist of 1980, and the Recommendation on Safeguarding Traditional Culture and Folklore of 1989.

2. This definition is in line with the conclusions of the World Conference on Cultural Policies (MONDIACULT, Mexico City, 1982), of the World Commission on Culture and Development (Our Creative Diversity, 1995), and of the Intergovernmental Conference on Cultural Policies for Development (Stockholm, 1998).

IDENTITY, DIVERSITY AND PLURALISM

ARTICLE 1 Cultural diversity:
the common heritage of humanity

Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind. As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.

ARTICLE 2 From cultural diversity
to cultural pluralism

In our increasingly diverse societies, it is essential to ensure harmonious interaction among people and groups with plural, varied and dynamic cultural identities as well as their willingness to live together. Policies for the inclusion and participation of all citizens are guarantees of social cohesion, the vitality of civil society and peace. Thus defined, cultural pluralism gives policy expression to the reality of cultural diversity. Indissociable from a democratic framework, cultural pluralism is conducive to cultural exchange and to the flourishing of creative capacities that sustain public life.

ARTICLE 3 Cultural diversity
as a factor in development

Cultural diversity widens the range of options open to everyone; it is one of the roots of development, understood not simply in terms of economic growth, but also as a means to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS

ARTICLE 4 Human rights as guarantees
of cultural diversity

The defence of cultural diversity is an ethical imperative, inseparable from respect for human dignity. It implies a commitment to human rights and fundamental freedoms, in particular the rights of persons belonging to minorities and those of indigenous peoples. No one may invoke cultural diversity to infringe upon human rights guaranteed by international law, nor to limit their scope.

ARTICLE 5 Cultural rights as an enabling
environment for cultural diversity

Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible and interdependent. The flourishing of creative diversity requires the full implementation of cultural rights as defined in Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in Articles 13 and 15 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. All persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons are entitled to quality education and training that fully respect their cultural identity; and all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

ARTICLE 6 Towards access for all to cultural diversity

While ensuring the free flow of ideas by word and image care should be exercised that all cultures can express themselves and make themselves known. Freedom of expression, media pluralism, multilingualism, equal access to art and to scientific and technological knowledge, including in digital form, and the possibility for all cultures to have access to the means of expression and dissemination are the guarantees of cultural diversity.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND CREATIVITY

ARTICLE 7 Cultural heritage as the wellspring of creativity

Creation draws on the roots of cultural tradition, but flourishes in contact with other cultures. For this reason, heritage in all its forms must be preserved, enhanced and handed on to 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.

ARTICLE 8 Cultural goods and services: commodities of a unique kind

In the face of present-day economic and technological change, opening up vast prospects for creation and innovation, particular attention must be paid to the diversity of the supply of creative work, to due recognition of the rights of authors and artists and to the specificity of cultural goods and services which, as vectors of identity, values and meaning, must not be treated as mere commodities or consumer goods.

ARTICLE 9 Cultural policies as catalysts of creativity

While ensuring the free circulation of ideas and works, cultural policies must create conditions conducive to the production and dissemination of diversified cultural goods and services through cultural industries that have the means to assert themselves at the local and global level. It is for each State, with due regard to its international obligations, to define its cultural policy and to implement it through the means it considers fit, whether by operational support or appropriate regulations.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND INTERNATIONAL SOLIDARITY

ARTICLE 10 Strengthening capacities for creation and dissemination worldwide

In the face of current imbalances in flows and exchanges of cultural goods and services at the global level, it is necessary to reinforce international cooperation and solidarity aimed at enabling all countries, especially developing countries and countries in transition, to establish cultural industries that are viable and competitive at national and international level.

ARTICLE 11 Building partnerships between the public sector, the private sector and civil society

Market forces alone cannot guarantee the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, which is the key to sustainable human development. From this perspective, the pre-eminence of public policy, in partnership with the private sector and civil society, must be reaffirmed.

ARTICLE 12 The role of UNESCO

UNESCO, by virtue of its mandate and functions, has the responsibility to:

- a. Promote the incorporation of the principles set out in the present Declaration into the development strategies drawn up within the various inter-governmental bodies;
- b. Serve as a reference point and a forum where States, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector may join together in elaborating concepts, objectives and policies in favour of cultural diversity;
- c. Pursue its activities in standard-setting, awareness-raising and capacity-building in the areas related to the present Declaration within its fields of competence;
- d. Facilitate the implementation of the Action Plan, the main lines of which are appended to the present Declaration.

MAIN LINES OF AN ACTION PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNESCO UNIVERSAL DECLARATION ON CULTURAL DIVERSITY

➔ The Member States commit themselves to taking appropriate steps to disseminate widely the "UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity" and to encourage its effective application, in particular by cooperating with a view to achieving the following objectives:

- 1_ Deepening the international debate on questions relating to cultural diversity, particularly in respect of its links with development and its impact on policy-making, at both national and international level; taking forward notably consideration of the advisability of an international legal instrument on cultural diversity.
- 2_ Advancing in the definition of principles, standards and practices, on both the national and the international levels, as well as of awareness-raising modalities and patterns of cooperation, that are most conducive to the safeguarding and promotion of cultural diversity.
- 3_ Fostering the exchange of knowledge and best practices in regard to cultural pluralism with a view to facilitating, in diversified societies, the inclusion and participation of persons and groups from varied cultural backgrounds.
- 4_ Making further headway in understanding and clarifying the content of cultural rights as an integral part of human rights.
- 5_ Safeguarding the linguistic heritage of humanity and giving support to expression, creation and dissemination in the greatest possible number of languages.
- 6_ Encouraging linguistic diversity – while respecting the mother tongue – at all levels of education, wherever possible, and fostering the learning of several languages from the earliest age.
- 7_ Promoting through education an awareness of the positive value of cultural diversity and improving to this end both curriculum design and teacher education.
- 8_ Incorporating, where appropriate, traditional pedagogies into the education process with a view to preserving and making full use of culturally appropriate methods of communication and transmission of knowledge.
- 9_ Encouraging "digital literacy" and ensuring greater mastery of the new information and communication technologies, which should be seen both as educational discipline and as pedagogical tools capable of enhancing the effectiveness of educational services.
- 10_ Promoting linguistic diversity in cyberspace and encouraging universal access through the global network to all information in the public domain.
- 11_ Countering the digital divide, in close cooperation in relevant United Nations system organizations, by fostering access by the developing countries to the new technologies, by helping them to master information technologies and by facilitating the digital dissemination of endogenous cultural products and access by those countries to the educational, cultural and scientific digital resources available worldwide.

- 12** Encouraging the production, safeguarding and dissemination of diversified contents in the media and global information networks and, to that end, promoting the role of public radio and television services in the development of audiovisual productions of good quality, in particular by fostering the establishment of cooperative mechanisms to facilitate their distribution.
- 13** Formulating policies and strategies for the preservation and enhancement of the cultural and natural heritage, notably the oral and intangible cultural heritage, and combating illicit traffic in cultural goods and services.
- 14** Respecting and protecting traditional knowledge, in particular that of indigenous peoples; recognizing the contribution of traditional knowledge, particularly with regard to environmental protection and the management of natural resources, and fostering synergies between modern science and local knowledge.
- 15** Fostering the mobility of creators, artists, researchers, scientists and intellectuals and the development of international research programmes and partnerships, while striving to preserve and enhance the creative capacity of developing countries and countries in transition.
- 16** Ensuring protection of copyright and related rights in the interest of the development of contemporary creativity and fair remuneration for creative work, while at the same time upholding a public right of access to culture, in accordance with Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
- 17** Assisting in the emergence or consolidation of cultural industries in the developing countries and countries in transition and, to this end, cooperating in the development of the necessary infrastructures and skills, fostering the emergence of viable local markets, and facilitating access for the cultural products of those countries to the global market and international distribution networks.
- 18** Developing cultural policies, including operational support arrangements and/or appropriate regulatory frameworks, designed to promote the principles enshrined in this Declaration, in accordance with the international obligations incumbent upon each State.
- 19** Involving all sectors of civil society closely in framing of public policies aimed at safeguarding and promoting cultural diversity.
- 20** Recognizing and encouraging the contribution that the private sector can make to enhancing cultural diversity and facilitating, to that end, the establishment of forums for dialogue between the public sector and the private sector.

The Member States recommend that the Director-General take the objectives set forth in this Action Plan into account in the implementation of UNESCO's programmes and communicate it to institutions of the United Nations system and to other intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations concerned with a view to enhancing the synergy of actions in favour of cultural diversity.

About the Year



Europe is becoming more culturally diverse. The enlargement of the European Union, deregulation of employment laws and globalisation have increased the multicultural character of many countries, adding to the number of languages, religions, ethnic and cultural backgrounds found on the continent. As a result, intercultural dialogue has an increasingly important role to play in fostering European identity and citizenship.

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (EYID) 2008 recognises that Europe's great cultural diversity represents a unique advantage. It will encourage all those living in Europe to explore the benefits of our rich cultural heritage and opportunities to learn from different cultural traditions.

The Year will feature a small number of flagship projects on a European level, as well as EU support for a national project in each Member State, and a Partner programme aimed at mobilising civil society. The active involvement of civil society will be essential in highlighting good practices and identifying needs in intercultural dialogue. Well-known ambassadors have also been appointed to raise awareness of the importance and benefits of intercultural dialogue.

The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008) was established by Decision N° 1983/2006/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council. (18 December 2006).

Related Links

- Workshop "Painting the Other" Workshop "Painting the Other" with children from two school classes from Schaerbeek in the run-up to the press launch of the EYID 2008

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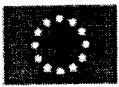


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DECISION No 1983/2006/EC OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND OF THE COUNCIL
of 18 December 2006
concerning the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008)

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

potential in a diverse, pluralist, solidarity-based and dynamic society, not only in Europe but also in the world.

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular the first indent of Article 151(5) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Having regard to the Opinion of the European Economic and Social Committee ⁽¹⁾,

Having regard to the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions ⁽²⁾,

Acting in accordance with the procedure laid down in Article 251 of the Treaty ⁽³⁾,

(4) At the heart of the European project, it is important to provide the means for intercultural dialogue and dialogue between citizens to strengthen respect for cultural diversity and deal with the complex reality in our societies and the coexistence of different cultural identities and beliefs. Furthermore, it is important to highlight the contribution of different cultures to the Member States' heritage and way of life and to recognise that culture and intercultural dialogue are essential for learning to live together in harmony.

(5) Intercultural dialogue thus contributes towards achieving a number of the EU's strategic priorities, in particular by:

Whereas:

(1) The Treaty establishing the European Community gives it the task of creating an ever closer union between the peoples of Europe and of contributing to the flowering of the cultures of Member States, while respecting their national and regional diversity and also highlighting their common cultural heritage.

— respecting and promoting cultural diversity in Europe, improving coexistence and encouraging active European citizenship open to the world and based on the common values in the EU,

(2) The combined effect of the successive enlargements of the European Union (EU), the increased mobility resulting from the single market, old and new migratory flows, more significant exchanges with the rest of the world through trade, education, leisure and globalisation in general, is increasing interactions between European citizens, and all those living in the EU, and the various cultures, languages, ethnic groups and religions in Europe and beyond.

— contributing to ensuring equal opportunities and non-discrimination within the EU by including the renewed Lisbon strategy, for which the knowledge-based economy requires people capable of adapting to changes and benefiting from all possible sources of innovation in order to increase prosperity,

(3) European citizens, and all those living in the EU temporarily or permanently, should therefore have the opportunity to take part in intercultural dialogue and fulfil their

— emphasising the cultural and educational dimension of the renewed Lisbon strategy and, in so doing, stimulating the cultural and creative economy in the EU, which generates growth and creates jobs.

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 185, 8.8.2006, p. 42.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 206, 29.8.2006, p. 44.

⁽³⁾ Opinion of the European Parliament of 1 June 2006 (not yet published in the Official Journal), Common Position of the Council of 14 November 2006 (not yet published in the Official Journal) and Position of the European Parliament of 12 December 2006 (not yet published in the Official Journal).

— supporting the EU's commitment to solidarity, social justice, the development of a social market economy, cooperation and greater cohesion in the respect of its common values,

- enabling the EU to make its voice better heard in the world and to forge effective partnerships with countries in its neighbourhood, thus extending a zone of stability, democracy and common prosperity beyond the EU, and thereby increasing the well-being and security of European citizens and all those living in the EU.
- (6) Intercultural dialogue is an important dimension in many Community policies and instruments in the fields of the structural funds, education, lifelong learning, youth, culture, citizenship and sport, gender equality, employment and social affairs, combating discrimination and social exclusion, combating racism and xenophobia, policy on asylum and the integration of immigrants, human rights and sustainable development, audiovisual policy and research.
- (7) It is also an increasing factor in the EU's external relations, particularly with regard to accession and candidate countries, the countries of the western Balkans, the candidate countries for association agreements with the EU and the partner countries of the European neighbourhood policy and other third countries, particularly developing countries.
- (8) Building on the basis of Community experiences and initiatives, a fundamental step is promoting the participation of each citizen, men and women on an equal footing, of each Member State and of European society as a whole in an intercultural dialogue, in particular through the structured cooperation with civil society. It contributes to creating a sense of European identity, by embracing differences and shaping the various aspects of belonging to a community.
- (9) For the purpose of the present Decision, the notion of 'active European citizenship' should not cover only citizens of the EU as defined in Article 17 of the EC Treaty, but any individual living permanently or temporarily in the EU.
- (10) The common values of the EU are those defined in Article 6 of the Treaty on European Union.
- (11) It is essential to ensure complementarity and a horizontal approach in all Community, national, regional and local actions with a strong intercultural dialogue dimension, given that the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue will help to raise their profile and increase their coherence. The planning of these actions, both at Community and national level, shall take on board, where relevant, the experience gained from actions under the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All (2007).
- (12) The European Year of Intercultural Dialogue should also contribute to integrating intercultural dialogue as a horizontal and trans-sectoral priority into Community policies, actions and programmes and to identify and share best practices in its promotion. Visible recognition of best practices and projects in the field of intercultural dialogue will encourage stakeholders and promote the idea among civil society.
- (13) Cooperation with other international institutions such as the Council of Europe and UNESCO could be developed as appropriate, in particular to take into account their experience and expertise in promoting intercultural dialogue.
- (14) It will also be important to ensure complementarity between the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and all external aspects of promoting intercultural dialogue initiatives developed within appropriate frameworks, including with those EFTA countries which are party to the EEA agreement, the countries of the western Balkans and the partner countries of the European neighbourhood policy. It will also be important to ensure complementarity with any other cooperation initiative with third countries, in particular developing countries, which is relevant to the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.
- (15) Actions of intercultural dialogue to be developed within relevant external relations instruments should inter alia reflect the mutual interest associated with the exchange of experiences and values with third countries and promote mutual knowledge, respect and understanding of their respective cultures.
- (16) This Decision is addressed to the Member States. The candidate countries should nevertheless be closely associated with actions under the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue through initiatives to promote developing intercultural dialogue within the relevant frameworks for cooperation and dialogue, particularly in the context of the civil society dialogue between the EU and these countries⁽¹⁾.
- (17) This Decision lays down, for the entire duration of the action, a financial envelope constituting the prime reference for the budgetary authority during the annual budgetary procedure, within the meaning of point 37 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 17 May 2006 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline and sound financial management⁽²⁾.

⁽¹⁾ See Commission communication of 29 June 2005 to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on civil society dialogue between the EU and candidate countries.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 139, 14.6.2006, p. 1.

- (18) The measures necessary for the implementation of this Decision should be adopted in accordance with Council Decision 1999/468/EC of 28 June 1999 laying down the procedures for the exercise of implementing powers conferred on the Commission ⁽¹⁾. An advisory committee is thus considered appropriate to the type and scale of the action envisaged.
- (19) Since the objectives of this Decision cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the need, in particular, for multilateral partnerships and transnational exchanges on a Community scale, be better achieved at Community level, the Community may adopt measures, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity as set out in Article 5 of the Treaty. In accordance with the principle of proportionality as set out in that Article, this Decision does not go beyond what is necessary in order to achieve those objectives,

HAVE ADOPTED THIS DECISION:

Article 1

Subject

The year 2008 shall be designated as the 'European Year of Intercultural Dialogue' to contribute to giving expression and a high profile to a sustained process of intercultural dialogue which will continue beyond that year.

Article 2

Objectives

1. The overall objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue shall be to contribute to:
- promoting intercultural dialogue as a process in which all those living in the EU can improve their ability to deal with a more open, but also more complex, cultural environment, where, in different Member States as well as within each Member State, different cultural identities and beliefs coexist,
 - highlighting intercultural dialogue as an opportunity to contribute to and benefit from a diverse and dynamic society, not only in Europe but also in the world,
 - raising the awareness of all those living in the EU, in particular young people, of the importance of developing an active European citizenship which is open to the world, respects cultural diversity and is based on common values in the EU as laid down in Article 6 of the EU Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 184, 17.7.1999, p. 23. Decision as amended by Decision 2006/512/EC (OJ L 200, 22.7.2006, p. 11).

- highlighting the contribution of different cultures and expressions of cultural diversity to the heritage and ways of life of the Member States.

2. The specific objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue shall be to:

- seek to raise the awareness of all those living in the EU, in particular young people, of the importance of engaging in intercultural dialogue in their daily life,
- work to identify, share and give a visible European recognition to best practices in promoting intercultural dialogue throughout the EU, especially among young people and children,
- foster the role of education as an important medium for teaching about diversity, increase the understanding of other cultures and developing skills and best social practices, and highlight the central role of the media in promoting the principle of equality and mutual understanding,
- raise the profile, increase the coherence of and promote all Community programmes and actions contributing to intercultural dialogue and ensure their continuity,
- contribute to exploring new approaches to intercultural dialogue involving cooperation between a wide range of stakeholders from different sectors.

Article 3

Content of measures

The measures taken in order to achieve the objectives defined in Article 2 are set out in the Annex.

They shall include the implementation of the following activities or the granting of support thereto:

- (a) events and initiatives on a European scale aimed at promoting intercultural dialogue, through involving directly or otherwise reaching as many people as possible, and highlighting achievements and experiences on the theme of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue;
- (b) events and initiatives at national level and regional level with a strong European dimension aimed at promoting the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, through directly involving or otherwise reaching as many people as possible, with particular attention being given to actions relating to civic education and learning to appreciate other people and their differences;
- (c) information and promotion campaigns, particularly in cooperation with the media and civil society organisations at Community and national level to disseminate the key messages concerning the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and the recognition of best practices, especially among young people and children;

- (d) surveys and studies on a Community or national scale and consultation with transnational networks and civil society stakeholders to assess and report on the preparation for, and the effectiveness and impact of, the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in order to lay the basis for its long-term follow-up.

Article 4

Cooperation by the Member States

Each Member State shall appoint a national coordination body, or an equivalent administrative body, responsible for organising that Member State's participation in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. It shall inform the Commission of that appointment within one month of the adoption of this Decision.

Each Member State shall ensure that the aforementioned body involve in an appropriate manner the various parties to intercultural dialogue at national, regional and local level.

The aforementioned body shall ensure the coordination, at national level, of actions relating to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.

Article 5

Implementation

1. The measures necessary for the implementation of this Decision shall be adopted in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 6(2).

2. Special attention shall be paid to cooperation with the European institutions, in particular the European Parliament.

Article 6

Committee

1. The Commission shall be assisted by a Committee.
2. Where reference is made to this paragraph, Articles 3 and 7 of Decision 1999/468/EC shall apply, having regard to the provisions of Article 8 thereof.
3. The Committee shall adopt its own rules of procedure.
4. The national representatives to the Committee shall be appointed preferably by the national coordination body referred to in Article 4.

Article 7

Financial provisions

1. Measures which are Community-wide, referred to in part A of the Annex, may be subsidised up to 80 % of their total cost from the general budget of the European Union.

2. The measures referred to in part B of the Annex may be subsidised up to 50 % of their total cost from the general budget of the European Union in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 8.

3. Measures which are Community-wide, referred to in part C of the Annex, shall give rise to a procurement contract or the award of grants financed from the general budget of the European Union.

Article 8

Application and selection procedure

1. Decisions on the awarding of grants shall be taken by the Commission in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 6(2). The Commission shall ensure a balanced and fair distribution between the Member States and among the different fields of activity involved, while taking into consideration the quality of the projects proposed.

2. Grant applications presented under Article 7(2) shall be submitted to the Commission by the body referred to in Article 4.

Article 9

International organisations

For the purposes of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the Commission may cooperate with appropriate international organisations, in particular with the Council of Europe and UNESCO, taking great care to ensure the visibility of the EU's participation.

Article 10

Role of the Commission

1. The Commission shall ensure coherence between the measures laid down in this Decision and other Community actions and initiatives.

2. The Commission shall endeavour to involve the candidate countries in the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, on the basis of their participation in a number of Community programmes including an intercultural dialogue dimension and by developing specific initiatives in appropriate frameworks, particularly in the context of civil society dialogue between the EU and candidate countries.

3. The Commission shall ensure complementarity between the measures taken to achieve the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and initiatives likely to be developed within the relevant cooperation and dialogue frameworks with those EFTA countries which are party to the EEA agreement, the countries of the western Balkans and the partner countries of the European neighbourhood policy.

4. The Commission shall also ensure complementarity with any other initiative of cooperation with third countries, in particular developing countries, relevant for the objectives of intercultural dialogue of the European Year.

Article 11

Budget

1. The financial envelope for the implementation of this Decision for the period from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2008 is EUR 10 000 000. Preparatory action shall be limited to 30 % of the overall budget.

2. Annual appropriations shall be authorised by the budgetary authority within the limits of the financial framework.

Article 12

Protection of the Community's financial interests

1. The Commission shall ensure that, when actions financed under this Decision are implemented, the financial interests of the Community are protected by the application of preventive measures against fraud, corruption and any other illegal activities, by effective checks and by the recovery of the amounts unduly paid and, if irregularities are detected, by effective, proportional and dissuasive penalties, in accordance with Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2988/95 of 18 December 1995 on the protection of the European Communities' financial interests ⁽¹⁾, Council Regulation (Euratom, EC) No 2185/96 of 11 November 1996 concerning on-the-spot checks and inspections carried out by the Commission in order to protect the European Communities' financial interests against fraud and other irregularities ⁽²⁾ and Regulation (EC) No 1073/1999 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 25 May 1999 concerning investigations conducted by the European Antifraud Office (OLAF) ⁽³⁾.

2. With regard to the Community actions financed under this Decision, the notion of irregularity referred to in Article 1 (2) of Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 2988/95 shall mean any

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 312, 23.12.1995, p. 1.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 292, 15.11.1996, p. 2.

⁽³⁾ OJ L 136, 31.5.1999, p. 1.

infringement of a provision of Community law or any infringement of a contractual obligation resulting from an act or omission by an economic operator which has, or would have, the effect of prejudicing the general budget of the European Union or budgets managed by the Communities, by an unjustified item of expenditure.

3. The Commission shall reduce, suspend or recover the amount of financial assistance granted for an action if it finds irregularities, particularly non-compliance with the provisions of this Decision, the individual decision or the contract granting the financial support in question, or if it transpires that, without Commission approval having been sought, the action has been subjected to significant change which conflicts with its nature or with its implementing conditions.

4. If the time limits have not been observed or if only part of the allocated financial assistance is justified by the progress made with implementing an action, the Commission shall request the beneficiary to submit observations within a specified period. If the beneficiary does not give a satisfactory answer, the Commission may cancel the remaining financial assistance and demand repayment of sums already paid.

5. Any amount unduly paid shall be repaid to the Commission. Interest shall be added to any sums not repaid in due time under the conditions laid down in Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities ⁽⁴⁾.

Article 13

Supervision

1. The beneficiary shall submit technical and financial reports on the progress of work for any action financed under this Decision. A final report shall also be submitted within three months of the completion of the action. The Commission shall determine the form and subject-matter of the reports.

2. For a period of five years following the last payment in respect of any action, the beneficiary of financial assistance shall keep available for the Commission all the supporting documents regarding expenditure on the action.

3. The Commission shall take every other step necessary to verify that the actions financed are carried out properly and in compliance with the provisions of this Decision and Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 248, 16.9.2002, p. 1.

*Article 14***Monitoring and evaluation**

By 31 December 2009 at the latest, the Commission shall submit to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions a report on the implementation, results and overall assessment of the measures laid down in Article 3 to serve as a basis for future EU policies, measures and actions in this field.

*Article 15***Entry into force**

This Decision shall enter into force on the day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

*Article 16***Addressees**

This Decision is addressed to the Member States.

Done at Brussels, 18 December 2006

For the European Parliament

The President

J. BORRELL FONTELLES

For the Council

The President

J.-E. ENESTAM

ANNEX

MEASURES REFERRED TO IN ARTICLE 3

A. CO-FINANCING OF ACTIONS ON A COMMUNITY SCALE

A limited number of emblematic actions on a European scale aimed at raising awareness, particularly among young people, of the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue may receive a Community grant of up to 80 % of the total cost.

These actions may consist of particular events, including a Community event to open and close the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in cooperation with the Presidencies in office during 2008.

As an indication, approximately 30 % of the total budget allocated will be devoted to these actions.

B. CO-FINANCING OF ACTIONS ON A NATIONAL SCALE

Actions at national level with a strong European dimension may fulfil the conditions for receiving Community aid of up to 50 % of the total cost.

These actions may relate in particular to the cofinancing of one national initiative per Member State.

As an indication, approximately 30 % of the total budget allocated will be devoted to these actions.

C. ACTIONS ON A COMMUNITY SCALE

1. Information and promotion actions including:

- (a) an information campaign coordinated at Community level and articulated in the Member States, building on best practices of intercultural dialogue at all levels;
- (b) cooperation with the private sector, the media, educational institutions and other partners from the civil society to disseminate information on the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue;
- (c) the design of a logo and slogans for use in connection with any activity linked to the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and the production of promotional tools to be made available throughout the Community;
- (d) appropriate measures for publicising the results and raising the profile of Community programmes, actions and initiatives contributing to the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue and to provide a European recognition to best practices, especially among young people and children;
- (e) the dissemination, of teaching materials and tools primarily intended for educational institutions, promoting exchanges on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue;
- (f) the establishment of a web portal to make actions in the field of intercultural dialogue accessible to the general public and to guide promoters of projects relating to intercultural dialogue through the various relevant Community programmes and actions.

2. Other actions:

Surveys, studies at Community level and consultation with transnational networks and civil society stakeholders to assess, and report on, the preparation for the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in order to lay the basis for its long-term follow-up.

3. Financing will generally take the form of direct purchase of goods and services by means of open and/or restricted invitations to tender. It may also take the form of grants.

The financial resources dedicated to Heading C shall not exceed 40 % of the total budget allocated.

D. ACTIONS RECEIVING NON-FINANCIAL COMMUNITY SUPPORT

The Community will grant non-financial support, including written authorisation to use the logo, once developed, and other materials associated with the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, in initiatives from public or private organisations, in so far as the latter may provide assurances to the Commission that the initiatives in question are or will be carried out during 2008 and are likely to make a significant contribution to achieving the objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. Initiatives organised in third countries in association or cooperation with the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, without being supported financially by it, may also receive non-financial support from the Community and use the logo and other materials associated with the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue.
