



**The Shared Societies Project:  
Democratic Leadership for Dialogue, Diversity and Social Cohesion**  
*Building a world safe for difference*

**47th Session United Nations Commission for Social Development**  
*Panel discussion on **Promoting Social Integration***

4 February, 2009 • 15:00 – 18:00 • UN Conference room 4

**Talking points for the Club de Madrid Contribution**  
by Wim Kok former Prime Minister of the Netherlands

**Focus of the session:**

To highlight regional perspectives and approaches to social integration and social inclusion.

The panellists are expected to review regional (and national) approaches and policies promoting social integration, indicate some links between poverty, employment and social integration and focus on challenges to social integration in their respective regions. The overall objective of the panel would be to make a case for the importance of social integration to social development.

The panel should also help to lay ground for the Commission's policy session next year which will focus on policy recommendations on social integration

**Talking points**

1. It is a pleasure and an honour to be able to take part in this panel today not only **in a personal capacity** but also as a **member of the Club de Madrid** - because the Club de Madrid has also taken this topic as a **priority area of work** in the same way that you have adopted it as the theme for this review and policy cycle. I am expecting we will find synergies between our efforts.
2. Let me first make a few general remarks from the perspective of the Club de Madrid because **we have a global membership and share experiences from many countries across the world.**
3. As you may know the Club de Madrid is an organisation of 72 former heads of state and heads of government from democratic countries and I am one of them. Together we have served for a **total of 1,000 years** in various leadership capacities and we wish to share that experience, our mistakes and our achievements with **current** leaders and also with civil society leaders.

4. We identify **key issues** that we recognise as important and where we feel **we can make a contribution and highlight aspects** of the issues that are being **overlooked**.
5. There are roles which we are able to undertake because of our previous experience:
  1. We have **convening power** – we can bring people together, as we did in the first Global Forum on Leadership for Shared Societies in November last year in Rotterdam.
  2. We have **opportunities to make our voice heard**, as today in this session of the Social Development Commission.
  3. And we can **also gain access to current leaders and share with them the burdens of leadership**. Often we can discuss immediate issues with them frankly but also confidentially. They have nothing to fear from us.
  4. We also **work with civil society** and help them to link to political leadership, but that is a role that other organisations can carry out as well of course.
6. At present the three key areas of our work are
  - energy and climate change with special emphasis on the poorest.
  - imperfections in the global financial and economic order and how to improve this, and
  - promoting shared societies, social integration and cohesion, theme for today's session
7. Our approach is based on celebrating difference as the basis for living together to build a "world safe for difference", a place where people can feel at home.
8. Our **first task** is to champion the importance of **building shared societies and making the case for it** – politically, ethically and economically. We believe it is a vital conversation of our age. We do not need to tell that to the Social Development Commission.
9. The focus of our efforts is **political leadership** and the question of **political will**. Political leaders are critical in determining if a society is **inclusive and shared** or if it **excludes and marginalises** people and **denies them opportunity**. Of course political leaders **cannot achieve all this on their own**. All sections of society have a part to play. There are many examples of civil society groups working to improve community relations and bringing marginalised sections of the population into the mainstream - but their efforts will be limited if the political leadership is not there. And in many places it is not sufficiently there and in these cases we need to look at why this is the case and **how** it can change.

10. We need to look at how international bodies **can work with and support leaders** in recognising the importance of this approach and that will be the focus of our session **tomorrow** so I will not say more on that now.
11. We want to show that it is possible to promote shared societies everywhere, even where leaders argue there is nothing that they can do.
12. It is in the **most divided** societies that some of the best examples of initiatives can be found. Where leaders are challenged not to ignore problems until society has broken down and, then, as a consequence, have to take action when it is too late already.
13. We made a **call to action** at the Club's General Assembly and it was endorsed at the First Global Forum. It invites leaders at all levels to take action and **become champions in promoting shared societies** and we have also circulated that to you (again, if you don't have a copy, ask a Club de Madrid staff who will share one with you).
14. We identified ten areas of social organisation and policy which need to be kept under review in all societies and addressed if there are problems.
15. We call them the **ten Commitments** and we commend them to the Commission as a way to frame what needs to be done. We have distributed copies of them to you (if you don't have a copy ask a Club de Madrid staff for one). They are **all** important.
16. Like ECOSOC we believe **social integration has to deal with poverty, access to employment and other factors which promote economic wellbeing**. But we also agree with ECOSOC that this is **not sufficient** and there need to be on top of that, and I quote, "specific measures to promote gender equality and foster social integration for **social groups**, such as youth, **persons with disabilities**, and **older persons**, as well as **migrants** and **indigenous peoples**".
17. Turning to Europe, and specifically Western Europe, there are of course **long standing minority groups** in most countries and they have in the main found their places in the society. **Some like the Sámi in Northern Scandinavia and Northern Finland are prospering**.
18. In Central and Eastern Europe some issues, related to similar long existing minorities, have come to the fore since the end of the Soviet Era (for example the Gagauz from Southern Moldova). In particular there are specific situations where members of one nationality were separated from the rest of that community by international borders.
19. For example there are Hungarian nationals in most of the countries bordering Hungary. Of course this is a common situation around the

world but the OSCE created an interesting mechanism to respond to potential difficulties. It established the High Commissioner on National Minorities and I am pleased that my own country hosts its office in the Hague.

The High Commissioner travels to all parts of Eastern Europe and Central Asia and explores issues with minorities and the political leadership and helps those countries to develop strategies which respect the national minorities and enables them to play a full part in society.

20. In Western Europe the main concerns have been related to immigration. Immigration is of course **not a new phenomenon** in Western Europe but as elsewhere the scale of the movement of population is much greater in modern times and the expectations of new migrants have changed.

21. The economic dimension has also changed over time.

In the past migrants came with the expectation that work was available and the host country sought their assistance. This of course **did not mean that there was no prejudice and discrimination.**

More recent migrations have been a response to deteriorating circumstances in the home country due to economic decline, war or famine and the immigrants have sought refuge in despair, sometimes as illegal entrants. Work was available but often in the black economy.

Now some of the larger industrial cities that absorbed the migrants have been in decline and there is a more obvious competition for employment between the host community and the migrants. This has **created serious tensions.**

22. Broadly speaking there have been two main approaches to new migrants: **assimilation** on the one hand and, on the other hand, diversity and **respect for difference.**

The former encourages new migrants to become as much like the existing population as possible, conform to existing norms and values.

The second considers that it is important to encourage new communities to value their roots and their traditions and facilitates them in doing this.

23. The same tendencies are evident in **immigrant groups.**

Some tend to want to integrate into the existing community and some seek to maintain their separate identity while individuals in each community make similar choices. So the situation can be very complex. Many immigrants want to be accepted as good citizens of their new country and at the same time maintain their traditional culture in relation to language, religion, marriage customs and so on. This can lead to tensions between older and younger generation.

24. The second and subsequent generations can feel rootless and uncertain. They can resent the paternal authority but at the same time also resent any sign of prejudice and disadvantage from the host community.

25. This sense of resentment towards the host community is closely bound up with life experience and social circumstances.

Some migrants and some migrant communities are very successful, but the reality is that too many second and third generation immigrants are disadvantaged, but also next to success stories exist.

This is true whether the state has adopted an approach based on assimilation or an approach based on diversity. They live in separate communities where living conditions are substandard. They under-perform in education and have difficulty accessing employment, either because of low educational attainment or racial prejudice. They are less willing to take inferior jobs than their parents.

And so a cycle of disadvantage and resentment is perpetuated, not dissimilar to the cycle of disadvantage and resentment which builds up in some members of the host community. It is not surprising that this continuous cycle leads to hostility between the communities.

26. Often migrants in these circumstances look for an identity group which they feel relates to their situation and helps them make sense of their circumstances.

This may be their religious or national group of origin but young people often form gangs which create their own identity mixing unique new elements with traditional culture and current popular culture.

Equally, disadvantaged members of the host community look for identity groups which may be right wing political parties or gangs.

27. So fairness and justice in economic opportunity and social circumstances are closely related to the level of social integration.

In Western Europe we have found that without tackling these problems, any policies and programmes based on inter-community dialogue and community relations will fail.

28. But **economic advancement alone is not sufficient.**

We have been shocked that many of those involved in violence in the last few years are well educated and working in responsible jobs in fields such as medicine and education.

In this context we have to note the growth of militant Islam - in part a reaction to Western policies and attitudes towards the Muslim world. It has certainly exacerbated tensions but it would be too easy to blame all the resentment and frustration on anti-western sentiments.

Many aspects of western culture are readily accepted by immigrants.

29. As we say in the Shared Societies Project, people need to feel at home and certainly part of that is being able to fulfil one's potential through gainful employment and in other ways.

But it is also a question of being respected by one's neighbours.

And it is also being at peace with oneself, knowing oneself and one's capacities, and knowing how to fit together the different aspects of one's identity – drawn from the country of origin, from the country of residence, from one's religion, one's education and employment experience, from wider cultural norms and so on.

30. As policy makers we are learning to understand these human processes which many of us have never had to face growing up and living in a relatively stable environment.

And we are learning to know how to support migrants going through those processes.

The way services are provided is as important as what is provided. Recognising difference and ensuring equality for all are not opposite ends of the policy spectrum – they are equally important elements in any policy.

31. In my own country there are programmes to greet new immigrants and help them find their way; we help them to learn Dutch and to understand the existing culture while respecting and sharing their own culture; we give special educational support to children in deprived areas; we have programmes for young unemployed youth to help them find work; there are organisations that are alert to issues arising between communities and cultures and take action to diffuse them; we try to improve the built environment so that it is more attractive and encourages people to interact; we involve communities in developing policies; we support agencies to provide advice and assistance to individuals who feel they have been discriminated against.

32. The Netherlands is not unique.

Similar programmes are being implemented in other parts of Western Europe and across the world. But problems still remain and occasionally flare up. But they are less likely to occur when these programmes are multifaceted as I have described.

33. The Shared Society Project is right when it says we must ensure that we meet all ten Commitments rather than concentrate on a few.

34. There is no silver bullet. But also there is no third option. As one of our supporters has said "Either we learn to live together or we will die together."

Thank you

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