



DURBAN REVIEW CONFERENCE - GENEVA 2009

A DECADE OF INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was held in Durban, South Africa in the first week of September, 2001.

2001 was also designated the United Nations Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations. The then Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan said of the initiative, "I see dialogue as a chance for people of different cultures and traditions to get to know each other better, whether they live on opposite sides of the world or on the same street."

In its final statement, the World Conference against Racism made several explicit mentions of the value of diverse cultures and stressed the importance of an on-going dialogue.

The Declaration spoke of the need to maximize the benefits of globalization through increased intercultural exchange and the preservation and promotion of cultural diversity, which can contribute to the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

In 2001 the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) produced the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity which strongly affirmed that respect for cultural diversity, tolerance, dialogue and cooperation are among the best guarantees of international peace and security.

The UNESCO Declaration was presented as 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. The Declaration was adopted unanimously.

On-going dialogue

These efforts at the start of the decade have led to an on-going dialogue.

The Alliance of Civilizations was formed as an organization in 2005, at the initiative of the Governments of Spain and Turkey, under the auspices of the United Nations. It aims to improve understanding and cooperative relations across cultures and religions to help counter polarization and extremism.

Last year the Council of Europe produced a White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue. In the Council's final report it says no part of society should exempt itself from engaging in an intercultural dialogue, the overriding objective being to promote full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

And this year as mandated the Durban Review Conference is being held to examine progress in the 8 years since the original meeting, to plot a way forward and to reaffirm commitment to the fundamental principles laid out in the 2001 Declaration.

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