High-level Discussion Segment 2

Peace and Reconciliation: How Culture Makes the Difference

Culture-aware approaches contribute to understanding, preventing, mitigating and recovering from conflicts. How can peace be built as an integral part of the sustainable development agenda? How can development actors effectively build shared universal values to foster dialogue and prevent conflicts? What lessons can we draw from the successes and failures of cultural diplomacy in preventing conflicts and fostering reconciliation?

Background Note[1]

The Role of Culture in Peace and Reconciliation

Peace cannot be achieved through violence;
it can only be attained through understanding.
Ralph Waldo Emerson

If asked what the greatest challenges the world faces today are, people may be inclined to refer to globalization, the economic crisis, the rapid pace of change that is setting back countries, societies and communities, as well as the rising level of the oceans, all of which remind us of the threats of unsustainable development, the persistence of poverty, the widening inequalities and the lack of future perspectives for entire social categories, especially youth. However, at the heart of these challenges lies the unabated aspiration for peace, which implies the necessity of finding a way of living together better in this world of growing complexity and uncertainty that all too often is now witnessing the outbreak of new forms of violence.

The most important challenge is thus how best to approach this "unity-in-diversity" by fully taking into consideration the infinite wealth of the cultures of the world and by averting the "fear reflex" when confronted with "otherness".

Peace has been and remains a permanent ideal and aspiration, as well as a right and a duty. However, in our fast-paced, interconnected world, peace is at risk. While world wars are becoming, it may be hoped, a thing of the past, violence, civil strife and conflict continue to define the lives of millions. Internal conflicts and terrorist attacks demonstrate that the presence of peace can never be taken for granted. As an ongoing process of political, economic and cultural negotiation, peace requires constant engineering, vigilance and active participation. It implies commitment and a long-term vision, and this entails a blend of traditional and contemporary ways of understanding the roots of conflicts, ways of mitigating violence, and paths towards reconciliation and healing.

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[1] Prepared by Ann-Belinda Preis and Christina Stanca Mustea.

Today, all conflicts are and must be a concern of all, since in our globalized world a conflict anywhere can generate conflict everywhere. In times of unprecedented communication, opportunities, interconnectedness and migration, the risks to peace also lie in the inequalities, fanaticism, and marginalization of vulnerable groups, as well as the rejection and ignorance of other cultures, together with their traditions, beliefs and histories.

The revolution in communication has had an added effect on conflicts in that they often "brew" virtually in social media and the blogosphere before their full impacts can be felt. The unprecedented amount of data generated over the past few years through the use of the Internet and cell phones points to an impressive sense of interconnectivity but also vulnerability.[2] New technologies construct virtual frames of reference, which have a direct impact in reality and thus play a potentially major role in different types of conflict. However, they escape accurate description due to the permanent shifts and changes in the landscape in which they evolve.

 "At least one fifth of humanity lives in countries experiencing significant violence, political conflict, insecurity and societal fragility. Such conditions form a major obstacle to development, with lasting implications for societal well-being. No country affected by violence or fragility has achieved a single MDG target. Countries with major violence have poverty rates more than 20 percentage points higher than the average."[3]

Evidently, to be genuinely sustainable peace must uphold the dignity of every man and woman; it must be nurtured by observing their rights and fulfilling their aspirations. At the same time, however, development is not sustainable if societies are not at peace with themselves and with their neighbours and living in environmental balance with the planet and its resources. Thus, peace and sustainable development complement and mutually reinforce each other.

Culture: Intrinsic to Development

In this context, culture emerges as an essential factor for both sustainable development and lasting peace. In fact, neither equitable progress nor social cohesion is truly possible if culture is left to one side. On the contrary, the road to inclusive social and economic development, environmental sustainability, peace and security is firmly *grounded in* culture, understood in its spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional dimensions and encompassing diverse value systems, traditions and beliefs. Culture informs and influences people's relation to sustainable development, conflicts, and reconciliation in a distinct, but direct manner. It determines and creates paths for lasting conflict-resolution and healing. Thus, as "a repository of knowledge, meaning and values that permeate all aspects of our

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[2] According to the International Telecommunications Union Database, in 2012 alone more data were generated than over the course of human history thus far. See also, Francesco Mancini, ed., *New Technology and the Prevention of Violence and Conflict* (New York: International Peace Institute, April 2013).
[3] "The Future We Want for All", para.44. (accessible at
http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/untaskteam_undf/untt_report.pdf)

lives, culture also defines the way human beings live and interact with each other and their environment."[4]

The Cultural Workings of Conflict and Peace

Defined as the "absence of violence" or the "absence of the fear of violence," peace can be associated with a multitude of factors and phenomena that reinforce one another, including gender equality, justice, relevant education and employment opportunities, the sound management of natural resources, human rights protection, political inclusion, and low levels of corruption.[5] However, most of these factors are culturally coded and hence are only definable contextually. Understanding the central role played by culture in identifying the roots of a given conflict and the related specific path towards reconciliation is thus an essential, if not determining, step in achieving lasting peace and security.

Yet, recent research has convincingly pinpointed the fact that the cultural dimension is often at the heart of peace-building processes by being at once part of the problem and part of the solution. As Michelle LeBaron has put it:

"Culture is an essential part of conflict and conflict resolution. Cultures are like underground rivers that run through our lives and relationships, giving us messages that shape our perceptions, attributions, judgements and ideas of self and the other."[6]

As a source of identity, meaning and belonging, culture can both facilitate social cohesion and justify social exclusion and xenophobia. Amartya Sen has aptly captured this paradox:

"A sense of identity can be a source not merely of pride and joy, but also of strength and confidence. And yet, identity can also kill – and kill with abandon. […] A sense of identity can make an important contribution to our relations with others. At the same time, it is important to recognize the fact that a sense of identity can firmly exclude many people as it warmly embraces others. The adversity of exclusion can be made to go hand in hand with the gifts of inclusion. Identity can be a source of richness and warmth as well as of violence and terror."[7]

A new type of conflict has emerged, "identity-based, ethno-political conflict,"[8] which has escaped the traditional resource and interest-based resolution methods. The overt focus on resources or power politics in dealing with identity-based conflicts have merely tended to exacerbate or prolong the struggle, independent of whether or not the conflicts in question involved issues of resources and other tangible interests. This points to the fact that:

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[4] *From Green Economies to Green Societies – UNESCO's Commitment to Sustainable Development*, 65.
[5] "The Future We Want for All", op. cit., para. 45.
[6] Michelle LeBaron , http://www.beyondintractability.org/bi-essay/culture-conflict
[7] Amartya Sen, *Identity and Violence* (Penguin, 2006), 2-3.
[8] Defined in detail in Jay Rothman and Marie L. Olsen, "From Interests to Identities: Towards a New Emphasis in Interactive Conflict Resolution," *Journal of Peace Research*, (289-305), 2001, Vol. 38, No. 3.

"Traditional methods of conflict resolution, which worked well in interstate conflicts where identity issues were not central, are not the best, or at least not the initial, tools to use in the types of challenging wars seen today, wars which are so centrally rooted in relatively non-negotiable issues of identity."[9]

Consequently, the changing nature of present-day conflicts, which occur less between states and more often within them, and which are led not by organized armies but by paramilitary groups and with civilians increasingly in the crossfire, call for new considerations about conflict-resolution and methods of reconciliation. "In these new wars, culture stands at the frontline."[10] The nature and evolution of present conflicts lend support to this argument:

"Identity, self, and personhood, as well as physical bodies, are strategic targets of war. In its more grotesque form, warfare is about destroying, not people, but what military strategists conceive of as humanity. This form of terror is not directed at the destruction of life and limb, but against all sense of a reasonable and humane world. A culture of violence, far more complex, multifaceted, and enduring than the formal boundaries of war demarcated in military culture, takes root in the quotidian life of a country at war. Self and identity constitute the hidden casualties of war."[11]

Heritage: Towards Shared Identities

It is clear that no one actor at whatever level can face these challenges alone. There is an urgent need for cooperation and multilateralism and for globally agreed, shared policies that integrate culture into peace-building strategies and programmes. Important actions here include the prevention of conflicts through education for peace, intercultural dialogue, the promotion and support of cultural diversity, and the fostering of international cooperation in science and technology, as well as the advancement of media programmes and the use of ICTs to combat violence. These are inclusive policies that place the emphasis on human rights, the freedom of expression, equity and equality, and dignity and dialogue.

In times of conflict, the protection of cultural heritage in all its forms is paramount. "Culture and heritage are not about stones and buildings – they are about identities and belongings. They carry values from the past that are important for the societies today and tomorrow. [...] We must safeguard the heritage because it is what brings us together as a community; it is what binds us within a shared destiny."[12] Three legally binding international treaties reinforce the idea of heritage as a reservoir of identity and meaning: the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict; the 1970 UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property; and the 1972 World Heritage Convention. These conventions also highlight the fact that attacks on cultural heritage translate directly

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[9] Jay Rothman and Marie L. Olsen, "From Interests to Identities: Towards a New Emphasis in Interactive Conflict Resolution," *Journal of Peace Research*, (289-305), 2001, Vol. 38, No. 3, 289-292.

[10] Address by Irina Bokova on "Protecting Culture in Times of War," Académie Diplomatique Internationale, Paris, 3 December 2012.

[11] Carolyn Nordstrom, "Terror Warfare and the Medicine of Peace," *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, (103-121), Vol. 12, No. 1, 1998, 105-108.

[12] Address by Irina Bokova on the occasion of the ICOMOS Gala to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of the World Heritage Convention, 2 December 2012.

into attacks on shared identity. Heritage is not targeted by chance: by destroying bridges, temples, mosques, churches and shrines, and manuscripts and libraries, the attackers aim to break both the connections to the past and the projections into the future of the attacked communities. This is one of the reasons why UNESCO has called for "seeing cultural heritage as an international security issue."[13]

At the same time, cultural heritage plays a key role in reconciliation. In post-conflict situations, cultural heritage often becomes a strong symbol and tool for the rebuilding of communities, helping them actively to break the cycle of violence. The rebuilding of the Old Mostar Bridge, as well as the reconstruction of the Old Town of Warsaw, and the inscription of these two properties on the World Heritage List are symbolic creative acts of reconciliation and a way to come to terms with collective trauma.

Initiatives to raise awareness and to act in order to safeguard and protect Mali's cultural heritage represent just one of the recent instances where culture's major role in conflict is evident, both as a source of tension and as a voiceless victim. Protecting the ancient manuscripts and rebuilding the mausoleums of Timbuktu, the Tomb of Askia in Gao, and the three major mosques of Djingareyber, Sankore and Sidi Yahia, as well as preventing the illicit trafficking of cultural objects in the region, constitute priorities not only for the country concerned, but also for the world as a whole. Cultural artifacts, while strongly embedded in tradition, send a humanistic message about the important of dialogue and tolerance, about refashioning cultural identities broken by the war, and about offering inspiration for posterity.

Although at times of war the protection of cultural sites, monuments and artifacts may seem to be a luxury in the middle of destruction and the loss of human lives, one should not forget that "protecting culture is also protecting people."[14] Culture represents an anchor of stability, and it is the foundation on which countries and people can hope to rebuild their lives. Cultural heritage is a core term in the reconciliation dialogue for many communities, and it can provide them with important resources to restore the links and lives broken by war.

Policy Strands

Unique and outstanding examples of the cultural heritage, forged over the passage of centuries, cannot be allowed to disappear in a matter of hours. It is for this reason that stronger "coalitions for culture" must be built in order to integrate culture and respect for cultural heritage into all international peace-building processes. The two UN Security Council Resolutions adopted in 2012 (2056 and 2071) represent but one step in this direction.

Protecting and safeguarding heritage alone is not sufficient to build peace. Without it, however, peace cannot be lasting. Cultural heritage not only offers a shared sense of identity and belonging to the greater story of humanity and paths to reconciliation, it also builds

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[13] Address by Irina Bokova on "Protecting Culture in Times of War," Académie Diplomatique Internationale, Paris, 3 December 2012.

[14] Address by Irina Bokova on "Protecting Culture in Times of War," Académie Diplomatique Internationale, Paris, 3 December 2012

genuine respect for uniqueness and "otherness" by dismantling stereotypes and fears of the unknown.

While culture can be found at the heart of many of today's conflicts, it is through cultural diplomacy that the root causes of violence, the prevention of crises, and the exploration of conflict-resolution and reconciliation strategies must be explored. Reflexive dialogue can be used as a method of reframing the terms of the conflict and transforming exclusive and adversarial positions into opportunities for articulation and reinvention.[15] Conflicts, if addressed in cultural-sensitive terms, can be a source of identity formation and inclusion.

Particularly when mainstreamed within educational strategies at the early stage, cultural initiatives that recognize diversity within a human rights-based approach may play a particularly important role in building confidence and tolerance among multicultural communities and in providing a common space for dialogue.

Culture-driven development, which acknowledges diversity and promotes the ability of individuals to freely participate in cultural life and access cultural assets, will considerably contribute to the building of a culture of "living together" and thus to peace and human security.

Encouraging cultural activities and creativity in conflict areas or areas affected by disasters will enable the affected communities to reconnect with their identities and regain a sense of normality, enjoying art and beginning to heal the scars of wars. Cultural programmes may also help foster appreciation of cultural diversity and appreciation of the "universal element" in all cultures, helping to "humanize" the other and paving the way towards mutual understanding.

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[15] A definition of "reflexive dialogue" has been proposed by Jay Rothman and Marie L. Olson in "From Interests to Identities: Towards a New Emphasis in Interactive Conflict Resolution," *op. cit.*, 296.