HIGH LEVEL DIALOGUE ON INTERRELIGIOUS AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FOR PEACE

UN 62nd General Assembly, UN New York 4-5 October 2007
Interactive Hearings, 4th October - Trusteeship Council Chamber
1st Panel: Challenges for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue

MAIN POINTS[1]
by Manuel Manonelles
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[1] These are the main points of the intervention of Mr. Manuel Manonelles as respondent, scheduled as a two minutes intervention.

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Thank you moderator, I would like to make a couple of complementary contributions to what it has been said this morning in the General Assembly plenary and what it has been said this afternoon at this hearings.

a) -IN TERMS OF CHALLENGES: PERCEPTIONS *versus* REALITIES:

In today's interconnected global society, that some define as a *screen-driven society* (driven by the screens of our TVs, our computers, cell phones of 2nd and 3rd generation, etc.) some times the importance of perceptions become even more significant than the actual realities. What defines the policies, what creates the feeling of a *clash of civilizations* –which, if it would exist I would define much better as a *clash of ignorances and misunderstandings*- is more a general perception of such a problem than the problem itself, exacerbated by a media machinery –and some irresponsible leadership- which keeps repeating –in many cases without specific intentions-stereotypes, misperceptions and misleading language that, instead of giving a transparent information of reality, do create even more fear and suspicion.

Therefore, one of the main challenges of today when trying to find modalities by which ensure successful actions and policies in the field of interreligious and intercultural dialogue is to ensure <u>a double-track work,</u> two tracks that, although being interlinked and complementary, are of complete different nature:

-On the one side, the track which deals with the real problems and realities (that have been already addressed enough in the debate)

-On the other side, the other track that deals with the perceptions, the stories and the narratives that help to create, in one way or another, the atmosphere in which we live today. In this sense, I would underline two key areas of work:

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-The *role of media* (as recognised by the Alliance of Civilizations Report[2] and the UNGA Resolution 61/221)

-Education, and especially *media-literacy* and *religious and culture education*[3]

But also what it is related to the issue of language and leadership, as recognised in the Alliance of Civilizations report[4].

b) -IN TERMS OF MAJOR ACTORS: SOME IMPLEMENTING ACTORS

There is almost no need to say the key and leading role the whole UN system has been playing in the promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (the Dialogue Among Civilizations process started in 1998-2001, the Alliance of Civilization process, the UNGA Resolution 61/221, this High Level Debate and the previous one on *Civilizations and the Challenge for Peace: obstacles and opportunities*[5], all the work done by agencies such as UNESCO, etc.).

It is also self-evident the key role that religious leadership plays in this field, and as it has been already mentioned, there are already many initiatives taking place in this field at the high level.

Nevertheless, as it is stated in the *Concept Paper* for this session, there is a widespread feeling that these "high-level activities", on the other hand so necessary, do not have the necessary impact into the grass-roots reality.

Therefore, in order to ensure a real and permeable impact it is essential to involve -a part, of course, of all specialised UN agencies, national governments, etc- those kind of actors which are closer to the daily reality of the citizen and that even sometimes they are already working

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[2] *Alliance of Civilizations. Report of the High-Level Group. 13 November 2006*. See: www.unaoc.org. Specially paragraphs 6.24 to 6.27
[3] Op. cit. 2: Paragraph 6.7 and 6.8
[4] Op. cit. 2: Paragraph 5.16
[5] Held during the 61st UNGA.

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in these areas (either because they have identified them as a priority, or simply because they just react to the problems they face). That is why <u>Regional and local authorities</u> (especially), and <u>civil society organisations</u>, are already working for many years and very strongly in this field. In many municipalities and counties or provinces several interesting initiatives can be found in terms of intercultural and interreligious management and exchange, and even on intercultural and interreligious conflict management at the micro and grassroots levels.

Here again, it would be of extreme interest if we could promote <u>another double track work</u>:

-On the one side, in combination with the abovementioned issue of perceptions, media and education, continue developing high level initiatives involving religious, civic and political leadership. These are necessary and key to give visibility, to set standards, etc.

-On the other side, day-to-day experience, and here the regional and local authorities, together with civil society organizations that work with them, could be of a tremendous help.

Thank you.

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