Milestones of the « Dialogue among Civilizations »

1946 Since the adoption of its Constitution, the desire to promote dialogue among civilizations as a means of fostering peace has been a priority of the Organisation. “…Peace must therefore be founded, if it is not to fail, upon the intellectual and moral solidarity of mankind”…’’ the Organization will collaborate in the work of advancing the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples…”

1950-1960 During this period, UNESCO conducted an intensive programme aimed at supporting the dialogue through the ‘Major Project on Mutual Appreciation of Eastern and Western Cultural Values’. This project aimed to address a perceived imbalance in knowledge and awareness throughout the world between Eastern and Western cultural values.

Between 1980-1990 ‘Intercultural Roads’ was the principal approach applied by UNESCO in order to promote intercultural dialogue while strengthening mutual understanding among civilizations, cultures and religions as well as highlighting their interactions and their mutual influences through concrete projects. For example, the ‘Silk Road’ project stimulated exchange between universities of different regions in order to promote the concept of multiple identities and to showcase the common heritage of the East and the West.

In the 1990s, a lively international debate took place surrounding discussions on “the clash of civilizations”, initiated by Samuel Huntington in 1993 (Journal of Foreign Affairs).


A UN resolution of 10 December 1999 stipulates the main principles of the dialogue among cultures: respect for the culture of others, engagement of governments and civil society and the reaffirmation of values common to all stakeholders in international society (tolerance, human rights, freedom …).

Resolution 54/113

In September 2000, UNESCO and the United Nations launched the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, at the initiative of Mr. Seyyed Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, during a round-table discussion organised on the eve of the United Nations Millennium Summit in New York.

2001 UNESCO decided to put the ‘United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations’ on the preliminary agenda for its 31st General Conference. The 31st General Conference reaffirmed the specific responsibility of UNESCO as the lead agency in promoting the dialogue among civilizations and commits the Organization to developing its own plan of action.

In November 2001 (also during the 31st session of the General Conference), UNESCO Member States unanimously adopt the ‘UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity’, which provides for the protection and development of all cultures as sources of creativity, innovation and exchanges among peoples. Furthermore, the Declaration also touches upon issues related to cultural diversity, such as identity, human rights, pluralism and international solidarity.

UNESCO, convinced that young people are crucial actors in promoting the principles of cultural diversity, published a youth-friendly version of the Declaration that integrates and presents young people’s ideas for concrete actions to promote cultural diversity.

‘All different, all unique: Young People and the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity’

In addition, in the context of the September 11 aftermath new impetus was given to the fight against terrorism by Resolution 31C/39 in which the General Conference affirmed that the dialogue “constitutes a fundamental challenge based on the unity of humankind and commonly shared values, the recognition of its cultural diversity and the equal dignity of each civilization and each culture”.

Resolution 31C/39

Still in 2001, (resolution of 9 November 2001), the United Nations General Assembly solemnly presented the Global Agenda for the Dialogue among Civilizations, which stipulates the principles of intercultural dialogue to be defended and the objectives to be achieved.
UNESCO is charged with coordinating the process and with developing concrete programmes fostering the dialogue (for example through the promotion of cultural tourism, the promotion of exchange between different countries and the development of mechanisms for the protection of cultural diversity).

Resolution 56/6


In New Delhi in 2003, UNESCO organised a ministerial conference in search of new perspectives related to the dialogue among civilizations and concrete activities in different domains were proposed:

- Education (education for all and quality education)
- Science and technology (including traditional knowledge systems)
- Cultural diversity in its entirety (including world heritage)

For the first time, this declaration raised the need to include young people as major stakeholders in all efforts pertaining to the dialogue among civilizations.

New Delhi Declaration

In 2003, UNESCO organised a Summit of Heads of State on the ‘Dialogue among Civilizations’ in Ohrid (Macedonia). Out of this meeting came the idea for a regional Youth Forum on the Dialogue to be held in 2006 with the aim of translating proposals and recommendations into action Message from Ohrid

In 2003, the 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference adopted the resolution ‘New Perspectives in UNESCO’s activities pertaining to the Dialogue among Civilizations’. This landmark resolution stresses the need to undertake concrete actions in the following key sectors:

(a) education, especially through the pursuit of the six Education for All (EFA) goals and efforts to promote quality education;
(b) sciences and technology, including the role of traditional and local knowledge systems
(c) cultural diversity in all its forms, including world heritage;
(d) the media and information and communication

Resolution 32C/47 urges governments and civil society to ensure the empowerment and full participation of women and young people in all efforts aimed at strengthening the dialogue.

Resolution 32C/47


In April 2005, UNESCO organised the 1st WAYS General Conference (World Academy of Young Scientists) which united more than 150 young scientists from 85 different countries who analysed the role of science and technology in the dialogue among civilizations. This conference initiated new mechanisms of cooperation between young scientists and adopted a set of suggestions for concrete measures to be taken.

WAYS

On 5 April 2005, a conference on ‘Dialogue among Civilizations, Cultures and Peoples’ took place at UNESCO Headquarters with the participation of Mr Seyyed Mohammad Khatami (President of the Islamic Republic of Iran) and Mr Abdelaziz Bouteflika (President of Algeria), two eminent personalities of the dialogue. This conference provided the opportunity to review activities implemented since the launch of the ‘United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations’ in 2000.

The Conference on ‘Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations’ which took place in Rabat (Morocco), 14-16 June 2005, highlighted the need for concrete and sustained actions to make the dialogue a reality in every-day life.
Emphasis was placed on education (multicultural and civic education) and communication as the basic pillars of intercultural dialogue. It was asserted that education and communication free from stereotypes and disrespect for other cultures must be available to everyone. The pressing need for social and humanistic dialogue in the field of science as well as culture was also noted, in order to promote mutual respect and understanding among stakeholders in the Arab world, both amongst themselves and with their Western counterparts.

Finally, the year 2005 will be marked by the organisation of the UNESCO Youth Forum of the 33rd session of the General Conference on the theme of "Young People and the Dialogue among Civilizations, Cultures and Peoples - Ideas for action in education, the sciences, culture and communication" (30 September – 2 October 2005). This forum (the 4th since its creation) will be organised around three working groups with the objective of articulating young people's recommendations and suggestions for the dialogue among civilizations. With this Youth Forum, UNESCO seeks not only to raise awareness of the dialogue among civilizations, but, even more importantly, to make sure that young people's visions and suggestions are an essential part of all its dialogue-related activities.

The “Dialogue among cultures and Civilizations' needs the visions, commitment and aspirations of young people – the dialogue needs your voice!

Dialogue-website of the Bureau of Strategic Planning