

On the Relations Between Intercultural Dialogue and the Right to Peace: Some Reflections in the Light of the Draft UN Declaration

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The scope, value and limitations of the draft UN Declaration on the Right to Peace (A/HRC/20/3) have been addressed extensively in the rich contributions enclosed in this Special Issue. For its part, this paper aims to add to the broad debate what may appear as a *sui generis* reflection, since its analytical focus lingers on just few sub-paragraphs of the draft instrument. Indeed, the idea of this contribution springs from the curiosity generated by the inclusion of intercultural dialogue among the tools that would contribute to the right to peace and aims to discuss if and what implications may be inferred from the not so obvious choice of introducing this concept in the draft Declaration.

Anticipating partly the conclusions, the draft text in itself does not bring ground-breaking innovations for the formal relationship between intercultural dialogue and peace-related issues. However, it is the view of this paper that the introduction of this concept into such an high value normative instrument would provide prospective interstices for intercultural dialogue and for those promoting it as well as for the development of a sustainable right to peace. Certainly, as the use of the conditional tense highlights, this reflection moves primarily along an idealistic line of thought. Even more significantly, it is based on a prospective scenario: the text of the Declaration is in fact likely to be subject to modifications in order to win states' resistance at the Human Rights Council, although the issues discussed in this paper should not be among the most controversial. Moreover, some critics may argue that intercultural dialogue actually occupies an irrelevant position in the overall picture of the right to peace. In this light, the main contribution of this paper is to be intended as raising interest on the mutual relationship between intercultural dialogue and the right to peace, with a view to shed light on possible action-oriented implications for the sustainability of the universal human right to peace as well as

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to encourage a bottom-up contribution to its support.

To sustain this argument, the paper first provides an outline of what can be intended with the expression «intercultural dialogue», trying to generalise a very heterogeneous and multi-faceted field of analysis. Then, the focus is moved onto the evaluation of how the relationship between intercultural dialogue and peace has developed in various contexts so far. Finally, the paper discusses the paragraphs of the draft Declaration under analysis and presents what are believed to be the major insights that the adoption of the instrument may bring to this debate.

1. The Puzzle of Intercultural Dialogue: An Overview

Outlining briefly what is intercultural dialogue is not an easy task. This apparently self-evident expression identifies in fact a very peculiar set of concepts, fuzzy and flexible, which has evolved over time. As a consequence, in order to pursue this task within the strict confines of this paper, the next paragraphs operate a simplification of what is, almost by definition, a realm of heterogeneity and specifications¹.

The label «intercultural dialogue» is generally applied to a number of different action- and policy-oriented initiatives, projects and programmes that a) actively involve individuals and civil society organisations and b) are based, as their common denominator, on two broad conditions: 1) the cultural, religious or ethnic diversity of the participants in the dialogue and 2) a commitment to encourage people to work together and sharing common values in respect of their diversities². The fields in which these initiatives are promoted vary slightly, mainly according to the degree of cultural heterogeneity addressed and to the geographical scope of the actors involved in their promotion. However, the areas of action in which intercultural dialogue has been more frequently developed so far are: intercultural education and training; exchanges among young people; media and audiovisuals, especially as concerns the representation of diversity in newspapers and in broadcasting; practices for reconciliation and coexistence among people in a situation of conflict; relations with migrant communities and minorities; and activities concerning artistic creativity and cultural heritage exchanges. Religion, in the form of «interreligious dialogue», is

¹ See, for a deeper reflection on the subject: L. Bekemans, M. Karasinska-Fendler, M. Mascia, A. Papisca, C.A. Stephanou, P.G. Xuereb (eds.), *Intercultural Dialogue and Citizenship. Translating Values into Actions, a Common Project for Europeans and Their Partners*, Venezia, Marsilio, 2007; F.R. Dallmayr, *Dialogue among Civilizations. Some Exemplary Voices*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; M. Pace, T. Schumacher (eds.), *Conceptualising Cultural and Social Dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean Area. A European Perspective*, Oxon, Routledge, 2007.

² See L. Bekemans, *General Conclusions*, in L. Bekemans, M. Karasinska-Fendler, M. Mascia, A. Papisca, C.A. Stephanou, P.G. Xuereb (eds.), *Intercultural Dialogue and Citizenship...*, cit., pp. 651-665.

dealt with in more controversial terms as some organisations tend to include it as a dimension of intercultural dialogue, while others prefer to separate the two in order to avoid its politicisation³.

A plethora of initiatives has been promoted in these fields under the same label in most of world regions and at all levels of subsidiarity, from the town to the major international organisations and cultural agencies. Each type of actor can be addressed as performing a specific task in the overall picture of intercultural dialogue.

International organisations have played the crucial role of operationalising an idea that was mostly debated in philosophical circles⁴ into their political agendas. They have provided common conceptual frameworks for the practical promotion of this global idea at least since the early 1990s. In particular UNESCO, the UN General Assembly and the European Union (in the Mediterranean) have devoted to this dialogue some early policy initiatives with the aim of fostering mutual knowledge and understanding between broad cultural groups (namely «civilisations»). Such a trend has dramatically increased following 11 September 2001. The situation created by the terrorist attacks in the US and the consequent war on terror launched by the «coalition of the willing» led some international observers and politicians to give credit (and resonance) to the prophecies on the «Clash of civilizations», presented in 1993 in a famous essay by Samuel Huntington⁵. In the resulting scenario, intercultural dialogue has rapidly become an handy tool strategic to soften fears, tensions and misunderstandings based on cultural and religious diversity⁶. The overall ambition became that of avoiding the escalation of conflicts both domestically, in multicultural societies, and internationally, between «world civilisations». In this framework, several regional and international organisations have added an intercultural dialogue component to their agendas, providing resources, stimuli and at times a global vision for a growing number of projects and initiatives.

States and local authorities have a more specific executive task, as they are required to adopt the policies needed to comply with the broader international vision for intercultural dialogue. Municipalities, in particular, have been attributed a major responsibility in promoting coherent and sustainable intercultural policies because of their functional proximity to the actors that

³ For instance, see Recommendation no. 1962 (2011) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue and, by contrast, ALECSO and ISESCO, *The Dialogue with the Other. Principles and Recommendations by a Group of Experts*, in T. Schoefthaler (ed.), *Adventures in Diversity. New Avenues for the Dialogue Between Cultures*, Bonn, Deutsche UNESCO-Kommission, 2007.

⁴ A notable example of the philosophical roots of intercultural dialogue is J. Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol. I*, Boston, Beacon Press, 1984.

⁵ S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?*, in «Foreign Policy», vol. 73, no. 3, Summer 1993, pp. 22-49.

⁶ With regards to Euromediterranean relations see on the topic, R. Del Sarto, *Setting the (Cultural) Agenda: Concepts, Communities and Representation in Euro-Mediterranean Relations*, in M. Pace, T. Schumacher (eds.), *Conceptualising Cultural and Social Dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean Area...*, cit., pp. 35-52.

are directly involved into the process of dialogue: individuals and members of the civil society. Accordingly, cities have been considered the «natural womb» for a fruitful implementation of these initiatives on the basis that they constitute the «place» where daily intercultural encounters happen spontaneously (in the streets, at school, in the working place)⁷. In this regard, the Intercultural Cities Programme of the Council of Europe should be mentioned since it has provided a methodology and a number of tools for enabling European cities to cope with the challenge of cultural diversity and to make this diversity thrive in contemporary societies⁸.

Finally, civil society organisations and networks have been described as the driving forces of intercultural dialogue⁹. The countless initiatives and projects they have been carrying out allow individuals and groups of people with different cultural and religious backgrounds to actively participate and to sustain, on a continual basis, the efforts to advance dialogue genuinely. The outlined multi-level and multi-actor structure is therefore a crucial feature of the practical implementation of this concept. Without this, intercultural dialogue would risk to be just rhetoric, although well intentioned.

2. Intercultural Dialogue and Peace: An Inherent Relationship

Such a variety of actors, initiatives and areas of action needs to be anchored to a common framework to be implemented properly and consistently. Experts, academics, cultural actors and politicians have been gathered by international organisations to join forces in order to provide viable sets of values, principles of action and strategic objectives on which practical initiatives should be shaped. The Report of the High Level Group of the Alliance of Civilisations (2006)¹⁰, the ISESCO's White Book on Dialogue between Civilisations (2002)¹¹; the Declaration of the Scientific Committee of the Symposium «Intercultural Dialogue» promoted by the European Commission (2002) and the Euromed Report of the «Groupe de Sages» (2003)¹² are some relevant outcomes of this ongoing effort. Values and principles recur in these reports, although with slight modifications according to the priorities of the organisation involved.

⁷ See L. Bekemans, *Urban Environment of Intercultural Dialogue in Europe: Why Cities Matter in Building a Democratic «Urban Civitas»*, in L. Bekemans, M. Karasinska-Fendler, M. Mascia, A. Papisca, C.A. Stephanou, P.G. Xuereb (eds.), *Intercultural Dialogue and Citizenship...*, cit., pp. 113-134; see also E. Banus, *The Art of Intercultural Dialogue*, in *ibidem*, pp. 101-112.

⁸ For more information, visit: http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/cultureheritage/culture/Cities/Default_en.asp (retrieved on 21 February 2014).

⁹ M. Manonelles, *Civil Society Participation in Intercultural Dialogue*, in «Pace diritti umani/Peace human rights», vol. VII, no. 2, 2010, pp. 131-141.

¹⁰ Available at http://www.unaoc.org/repository/HLG_Report.pdf (retrieved on 23 February 2014).

¹¹ Available at http://www.isesco.org.ma/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=2&Itemid=96 (retrieved on 15 February 2014).

¹² Available at http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/policy_advisers/archives/experts_groups/docs/rapport_complet_en.pdf (retrieved on 23 February 2014).

They include, *inter alia*, equality between participants, cross-fertilisation, mutual knowledge, respect of cultural diversity, sharing of common values and the respect of human rights. The latter, in particular, have been acknowledged as a particularly suitable paradigm of reference to ensure that dialogue is made on an equal basis. In this perspective, universally recognised human rights act as a transcultural code that allows dialogue to be based on the same universally accepted values, common to all human beings¹³.

As concerns the objectives, the list is long and diversified according to the organisations and to the specific initiatives. However, as already anticipated, the general idea emerging from both the mentioned reports, policy documents and NGOs action programmes is that all these actions should be ultimately aimed at encouraging and mobilising concerted action toward a «common good». The latter has been rendered alternatively as the construction of a plural and active citizenship, as a reduced level of social tensions and world unbalances as well as a bottom up contribution to the solution of protracted ethnic and religious conflicts.

What has been broadly outlined so far suggests that the conceptualisation of intercultural dialogue has been implicitly connected with human rights and peace issues from the very outset. A more attentive empirical analysis, however, shows that such an inherent relation is often self-evident in the ratio of the activities promoted under the label «intercultural dialogue», but only occasionally it has been mentioned or pursued in explicit terms. A list of examples from different contexts and periods may be helpful to clarify how the link between these two elements has been addressed.

For instance, the functional relationship between intercultural dialogue and peace-making has been the subject of a speech delivered by the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon to the Security Council in May 2010. In that context, in light of the rapid and unpredictable pace at which the world is changing, intercultural dialogue was considered «essential for achieving peace and security in the broadest sense», in particular by defusing tensions, keeping situations from escalating, promoting reconciliation in the aftermath of conflicts and introducing moderate voices into polarised debates¹⁴.

Among civil society projects, the Anna Lindh Foundation for

¹³ To deepen the reflection on the relation between intercultural dialogue and the human rights paradigm see A. Papisca, *Citizenship and Citizenships Ad Omnes Includendos: A Human Rights Approach*, in L. Bekemans, M. Karasinska-Fendler, M. Mascia, A. Papisca, C.A. Stephanou, P.G. Xuereb (eds.), *Intercultural Dialogue and Citizenship...*, cit., pp. 457-480.

¹⁴ Ban Ki-moon, *Remarks to Security Council on Intercultural Dialogue for Peace and Security*, 26 May 2010, available at https://www.un.org/apps/news/infocus/speeches/statments_full.asp?statID=823 (retrieved on 26 February 2014).

Dialogue between Cultures, established in 2005 by the EU and its Mediterranean partners, has devoted many resources to promote peace and coexistence, in particular to foster reconciliation between Israeli and Palestinian civil societies. A relevant global initiative, labelled «Restoring Trust, Rebuilding Bridges», was launched by the Foundation and the UN Alliance of Civilisations (established in 2007) in the aftermath of the military operation conducted by Israel in Gaza between 2008 and 2009 (operation «Cast Lead»).

A functional link between intercultural dialogue and peace has been also referred in international instruments, both with a political and a legal value. On the one hand, the Culture Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted in 2003 in Opatijia (Croatia) a Declaration on Intercultural Dialogue and Conflict Prevention. The document, however, does not provide specific instructions on how the two subjects of the Declaration should be practically related and intercultural dialogue is dealt with mainly as an objective, rather than as a tool to prevent conflicts. On the other hand, UNESCO, which is constitutionally oriented at promoting a culture of peace¹⁵, has mentioned for the first time the relationship between intercultural dialogue and peace in an international legally binding instrument. In its Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions (2005), dialogue between cultures stands out in paragraph (c) of Article 1 among the general objectives of the Convention. The efforts to promote dialogue, moreover, are considered functional to ensuring wider and balanced cultural exchanges in favour of intercultural respect and a culture of peace. A similar approach is followed also in the Programme of Action on Culture of Peace and Non-violence and in many other initiatives launched by this specialised agency since 2000. More recently, notable initiatives within the UN system in this field have been the launch of the International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022) and the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution 68/126 (2013) on the Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace.

This brief overview has showed that a conceptual link to peace is implicit in the broad idea of intercultural dialogue. Yet, this inherent relation has not led to a coherent and explicit acknowledgement of the functional link between the

¹⁵ The reference is here to the Preamble of UNESCO's Constitution (1945) which notably opens as follows: «since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed».

two concepts over time. When this has happened, two broad approaches can be identified: dialogue as a tactical instrument to contribute solving material conflicts and divergences in a relatively short term, and dialogue as a strategic component for the promotion of a culture of peace in a longer term.

3. Insights from the Draft Declaration

In view of what has been broadly outlined so far, would the UN Declaration on the Right to Peace bring any significant novelty to the relation between intercultural dialogue and peace?

To answer this question it is first necessary to quote what the document actually states about this relationship. Intercultural dialogue is mentioned twice in Article 4 (right to peace education and training). The first paragraph addresses peace and human rights education and training as a right of all peoples and individuals, as the necessary basis of any educational system and as a tool for a number of processes that are crucial to the achievement of the goals of the draft Declaration. This type of education should be conducive, the text reads, «to a new way of approaching human relationship within the framework of the UNESCO Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace and Dialogue among Cultures». Few lines below, in paragraph 5 of the same article, the focus is moved onto states' duties in ensuring the right to peace education and training. *Inter alia*, states are called to update and revise educational and cultural policies with a view to reflect a human rights-based approach, cultural diversity, *intercultural dialogue* and sustainable development.

Two set of remarks can be made in light of these references:

a) Quite evidently, the functional link between intercultural dialogue and the right to peace in the draft Declaration is viable through the right to peace and human rights education. The trinomial «education-human rights-peace» has been for long¹⁶ a feature of the UN system, including the adoption in 2012 of the UN Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training (A/RES/66/137). Although less systematically and with some degree of terminological overlapping¹⁷, also the inclusion of intercultural dialogue in the picture is, as seen, not a novelty in general terms. When adopted, however, the Declaration will provide a further recognition of this functional link in a

¹⁶ A milestone in this regard is the Declaration and Programme of Action on a Culture of Peace, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 September 1999 (A/RES/53/243).

¹⁷ There is a certain trend in documents, statements and initiatives to blur «intercultural dialogue» with related concepts such as «cultural diversity», «knowledge about other cultures», «multiculturalism» or even «cultural rights». Although mutually interdependent, as this brief paper has tried to show, intercultural dialogue is something more articulated than just a synonym of other related concepts.

normative instrument whose goal is among the most crucial in all human experience: the right to peace. In this regard, a remark that should be done is that the relationship intercultural dialogue/peace acknowledged in the draft Declaration goes more in the direction of a long term strategic contribution to build a culture of peace, rather than, as in other above-mentioned examples, of a tactic tool to smooth tensions in situations of protracted/frozen conflict.

b) Rather than just an instrument functional to the right to peace through education, intercultural dialogue is addressed as a sort of benchmark, as a framework of reference to guide and improve those educational and cultural policies needed to ensure the recognition and sustainability of the right to peace. The attribution of this role suggests that, eventually, the contribution of intercultural dialogue to the right to peace should not be necessarily limited to the sole field of peace and human rights education. Indeed, the scope of dialogue among cultures could be easily expanded, benefiting from the huge expertise accumulated in very different fields of action, as a suitable parameter for other strategic objectives set forth in the draft Declaration, such as eliminating discrimination and ensuring the right to development (Article 9) and to human security (Article 2). This opportunity may be considered by the Advisory Committee to strengthen further the effectiveness and the sustainability of the right to peace, as the ensuing conclusions suggest.

4. Conclusions

In reply to the question above, the text of the draft Declaration does not appear to bring major formal innovations for the relationship between intercultural dialogue and peace, especially as concerns the role of the former in the construction of a culture of peace. However, the quoted references identify something more than the simple recognition of the strategic usefulness that this type of dialogue has gradually achieved through decades of multi-actor efforts world wide. Intercultural dialogue is presented as a framework of reference for ensuring the respect of the right to peace in the field of peace and human rights education and potentially, the paper has suggested, also

in other fields mentioned in the draft Declaration. In this context, the paper believes that the introduction of dialogue in this normative instrument would bring interesting interstices for both the enhancement of intercultural dialogue and the achievement of the right to peace. Indeed, the Declaration may (prospectively) provide a common normative framework and a shared objective for the many heterogeneous initiatives promoted under the label «intercultural dialogue». The «common good» to which all the various programmes and policies shall aspire to would be thus condensed in the strategic support to the right to peace. Accordingly, all the actors actively involved in intercultural dialogue activities would be attributed with a special role in the development of this right. Individuals, civil society organisations, local and national administrators, as well as the officers of international organisations and agencies involved in the promotion of intercultural dialogue, would be legitimised by the Declaration as a sort of «right to peace defenders»¹⁸. As a consequence, this is the general sense that can be inferred from this draft Declaration as concerns the specific debate on intercultural dialogue (which, it is worth reiterating, is an infinitesimal component of the comprehensive picture of the right to peace): who promotes intercultural dialogue, at all levels, is not only inherently entitled to the right to peace (as an individual), but is also encouraged and, to a certain extent, legitimised to pursue his/her efforts vigorously as a valiant contribution to the development of this right. This would be a very strategic foundation as intercultural dialogue provides, in perspective, an enormous supply of human resources, expertise and experience to advance and sustain from the bottom up the universal human right to peace.

¹⁸ The analogy, with the due limitations of scope, is with the so-called «UN Declaration on Human Rights Defenders» of 1999 (A/RES/53/144).