

World Cup Roundtable on Promoting Understanding among Cultures and Peoples

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Summary of the statement by

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The Dialogue of Civilizations: Philosophical Basis, Political Dimensions and the Relevance of International Sporting Events

Since the end of the Cold War, the “dialogue of civilizations” has become one of the keywords in the global discourse on issues of world order and peace. Traditional enemy stereotypes along the ideological lines of the earlier East-West conflict have disappeared while new confrontational schemes are becoming visible under the slogan of a supposed “clash of civilizations.”

The nature of dialogue consists in the ability to see oneself from the perspective of the other. The human being’s consciousness – self-reflection – is only possible if the subject is aware of the other, i.e. of that which is not the self, that from which it can distinguish itself. Semantically, this is the essence of the Latin word *definitio*. Applied to the level of civilization, this entails that full understanding and development of any given civilization can only be achieved if the respective civilizational community not only takes note of, but positively interacts with other civilizations on the basis of (normative) *equality*. Thus, the “dialogue of civilizations” is the fundamental requirement for defining each civilization’s identity and for reaching its maturity and universal relevance.

The common values underlying all civilizations – making possible genuine civilizational progress – are those of *tolerance* and *mutual respect*. Acceptance and realization of those values is the necessary, though not the only condition for the adequate self-comprehension and identity of a civilization. An analogy can be drawn, in this regard, between the normative equality of civilizations on the socio-cultural level and the concept of the sovereign equality of states on the political level.

One of the most serious threats to international peace and stability, i.e. to the realization of the basic goals of the United Nations Organization, is the persistence – or even creation in certain cases – of enemy stereotypes along civilizational lines. Over the centuries, the demonization or vilification of another civilization (particularly in regard to religious identity) has often been a prelude to armed conflict and has served to create a pretext for – or to legitimize – the violent pursuit of mainly economic interests. At the beginning of the third millennium, the world should not repeat the mistakes of an earlier era. No civilization should try to establish hegemony over the other. The claim to civilizational superiority has too often been a recipe for confrontation, even armed conflict.

It is the special role of international organizations such as UNESCO to promote a new global philosophy and awareness of the importance of civilizational dialogue and to strengthen all tendencies aimed at the establishment of a *just international order* in which *all* civilizations can express themselves and interact with each other freely and on an equal basis. The unipolarity of the global power structure, diagnosed and regretted at the same time by many who propagate the idea of a just New World Order, should not be reciprocated by cultural unipolarity and civilizational hegemony. UNESCO can play a crucial role in facing this basically new challenge mankind is confronted with as a community of nations: namely by redefining the organization's earlier policy calling for the establishment of a new communication order, and by adapting it to the requirements of our time, i.e. to the needs of a world community threatened by civilizational tensions that may even trigger a wider global conflict. Since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, that have been condemned by all who believe in basic human values and in the common mission of mankind, the promotion of fair and balanced relations among civilizations – on the basis of equality and mutual respect – has become more important than ever. The shaping of a *global cultural policy*, which is in line with this philosophy, will be a basic contribution to world peace on the part of UNESCO. The Cold War between the political-ideological systems in the era of bipolarity must not be followed by a “cold war among civilizations.”

In the present era of globality, international sporting events such as the World Cup 2002 play a special role in the field of international relations. In the crucial transitory period of history we are in right now, a global sporting encounter such as the one being jointly sponsored by Korea and Japan may help to foster the spirit of dialogue and co-operation among the nations – and through them the civilizations – of the world. According to the Olympic idea (applicable also in the present case), in the field of sports the rival team is not and should not be perceived as the “*enemy*” – as it should neither be seen as a “surrogate enemy” in a political dispute between nations –, but as the *equal partner* in competition. Such an understanding of international *competition* can also be a model for political relations between states.

A global sporting event like the present one realizes in an exemplary manner the principle of “*unity in diversity*” which may be considered as the essence of a genuine dialogue among civilizations. The interest in and enthusiasm for the sports discipline of football probably unites *more* nations, peoples, ethnic groups, races, cultures, citizens from all denominations and all walks of life than any other sport – in the pursuit of a shared interest and a *common goal*. This discipline of group sports – and the spirit of competition under conditions of equality and fairness attached to it – serves as *common denominator* for the most diverse gathering of citizens of the globe – united in their enthusiasm for the sport they all cherish –, whether as active participants or supporters of their teams. The fact that the World Cup 2002 is jointly hosted by Korea and Japan gains special significance in the overall context of peaceful co-operation and dialogue among nations and reinforces the positive impact of the event on the regional as well as the international political climate.

In the present volatile situation of international relations, an event such as the World Cup 2002 has not only special importance for the promotion of intercultural understanding in general, it will also contribute to strengthening the ever more complex social and cultural network spanning the globe and uniting people everywhere in the pursuit of a common goal defined by the jointly agreed rules of a sportive game. In this sense, “globalization through sports” may contribute to the bonum commune [common good] of mankind; more than that, it may be a powerful antidote to the nurturing of social and cultural stereotypes that are often at the roots of international conflict.
