

Culture and Peace

The City of Mexico Declaration



20 October 2018

We the undersigned of this declaration believe that culture is a great resource for humanity to reorient itself towards building societies upon a foundation of dialogue and coexistence. It is here where diversity shall not separate us, but instead serve as the basis of our wealth, where inclusion and acknowledgement shall be the responsibility of everyone, and where the equality that offers us all the same inalienable rights as human beings can lead us to harmony and peace.

It is essential to improve social conditions, pursue economic development, promote the equal distribution of wealth, and ensure environmental sustainability. However, we have observed that these are insufficient in creating a viable project for a humanity that still lives immersed in a rapid process of corruption, inequality, social breakdown, forced migrations and expulsions, violent economic and political realities, discord between identities, and contempt for the rights of women, youth, indigenous peoples, and communities that suffer discrimination, criminalisation, or persecution because of their sexual identities or their racial and social appearances.

In recognising:

That Agenda 21 for culture, promoted by the global organisation United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) was approved and is being implemented by hundreds of cities and local governments around the world that are committed to human rights, cultural diversity, sustainability, participative democracy, gender equality and creating the conditions for peace;

That through the Fribourg Declaration as well as other local, regional, and international tools, a wide range of political and social actors have recognised the importance of Cultural Rights as essential for human dignity, because they are human rights and must be understood under the principles of their universality, indivisibility and interdependence;

That it is difficult, but essential, to guarantee cultural rights in cases of extreme poverty, or that these cannot be exercised in areas of war or endemic violence, discrimination, exclusion, inequality, and oppression;

That it is in cities, towns, streets, squares, neighbourhoods and spaces of proximity where people can more easily and effectively exercise their Cultural Rights, therefore requiring a special role for local governments in developing policies that facilitate active participation in cultural life, addressing the existing obstacles to it, and exploring interrelations with other areas of sustainable development and peace-building;

That it is not a matter of having to choose between a hegemonic, global, and commodified culture, or a relativism that violates fundamental human rights to maintain cultural characteristics by imposing intolerance, monolithic thinking, political or religious totalitarianism; and that culture should never serve as an instrument for ideological indoctrination or political control, but should be the quintessential space for freedom, critical thinking, and even dissent;

We issue this declaration with the certainty that many of the enormous difficulties we face around the world have a clear cultural dimension, and that culture is an unequivocal part of the solution to humanity's present day challenges.

As a result, we the undersigned of this declaration:

- Urgently call upon international organisations, national and local governments, civil society organisations, and all citizens to prioritise peace with justice as a primary goal based on the full exercise of Cultural Rights, individually or collectively, to be achieved simply by putting culture at the centre of public policies, while respecting both the freedoms of citizens and communities as well as their democratic participation.
- Demand that Cultural Rights are fully promoted and guaranteed, and that the development of cultures and their diverse expressions be made priorities in policy, so as to effectively contribute to the eradication of extreme poverty, war, violence, inequality, oppression, discrimination, racial hatred, and exclusion.
- Stress an urgent need to establish inclusive and sustainable societies in which differences are recognised, respected, and valued, where we all have the same rights, where dissent is not a crime, and where expressing or fully developing our own individual and collective identities is met by others with respect, acceptance, tolerance, and dialogue.
- Assert that the joint construction of inclusive and sustainable societies indisputably requires developing public policies around Cultural Rights; these public policies must be built in a collective and cross-cutting way with all the actors of cultural diversity, thereby reflecting contemporary societies.
- Encourage listening to those voices from diverse communities that demand the unrestricted right to freely express themselves and their identities,

their historical memory and heritage, language and self-determination, access to cultural goods and services, to education and information, and to the best conditions for developing their creativity, and their participation in decision-making processes based on gender equality.

- Call on international organisations, national and local governments, public and private institutions, and civil society organisations to focus political agendas on the cultural development of communities and individuals, understood as the full exercise of Cultural Rights, and to assume that culture shall be viewed as a cross-cutting axis of all social expressions, and therefore must occupy a central place in public policies and social transformation initiatives.
- Believe that the success of the 2030 Agenda set by the United Nations, its Sustainable Development Goals, and the New Urban Agenda stands on the cultural dimension of development to be explicit and operational.
- Strongly emphasise the need to defend the rights of the most affected communities including firstly women, indigenous peoples, children and youth, the elderly, displaced persons, migrants and exiles, the communities of sexual diversity, the victims of violence and armed conflicts, persons with any disability and those living in poverty and exclusion, either in urban or rural territories.

Mahatma Gandhi said to us: "*There is no path to peace. Peace is the path*". This is why we endorse this declaration. We are convinced that cultural development and the full exercise of Cultural Rights by peoples, communities, and individuals are fundamental acts of peace. While these may be fragile and subtle, they are also the most critical elements for human progress.



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