

clash of civilizations would also start, through an erroneous perception and a fallacious mental image of other human groups. UNESCO may want to conduct the dialogue on strengthening relations between human groups from different cultural backgrounds at three levels:

The first level, to be comprised of a purely scientific activity involving scholars in history, politics, and social sciences, with a view to disclosing the truth of the claims of the so-called clash of civilizations and whether what appeared to be a clash of civilizations was, in actual fact, a result of either conflicting strategic, economic, political, and military interests, or manipulation of the basic loyalties of people in order to serve the narrow interests of political leaderships.

The second level, to be mainly geared toward the men and women who are the opinion shapers in the public information field and all its media, with a view to exploring the best ways to clarify the effects of erroneous images that the media might convey of groups from differing cultures. This activity could also include the faculties and administrators of educational institutions, especially those responsible for deciding the curricula, particularly those intended for the young in their earlier formative stages.

The third level would bring together political leaders and statesmen from different cultural groups with the aim of eliminating tensions between those groups and reducing the prospects for clashes between them. . . .

Abdelaziz Bouteflika

'Know Yourself by Knowing the Other'

Excerpts from the speech of Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to the roundtable of the UN Economic, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Emphasis is Mr. Bouteflika's.

If asked why the year 2001 has been proclaimed as the United Nations Year for Dialogue among Civilizations, I would say that if men's lives can be measured in terms of years, that of ideologies in terms of decades, and that of nations



in centuries, the unit of time for civilizations, born of the interaction among the ones and the others, is indeed the millennium.

Throughout the last millennia, the seven or eight main civilizations of the world took the mold of the great religions, which had constituted their cradle. As temporal ambitions, demography of economy allowed, their continuous interactions led to an alternation of dialogue and confrontation, in a continuously renewed movement of ebb and flow.

Today, we are legitimately willing to regulate, at the planetary level, these variations, in order to favor dialogue over conflict, and further ensure the promotion of peace.

Otherwise, and having just got out of an ideological conflict which could have triggered disastrous consequences, we run the risk of moving straight toward an even more dangerous explosion of violence, stemming from the polarization of the differences among our civilizations. History shows that if material power can defeat an ideology, it can not obliterate a civilization without destabilizing the whole planet.

Today's nations, which forged their independence and became aware of their identity as such, belong to cultural spaces that have durably marked their historical evolution and shaped their cultural being. The concept of nation in its most modern understanding, does not mean breaking with this civilizational heritage, consubstantial with the people's personality. It is important to assume it, rehabilitate it, and make it known as a concrete proof of human creativity, and an integral element of mankind's heritage.

Without going back too far in history, the colonial expansion of the 19th Century, to mention only the Muslim civilization my country belongs to, was manifested by attempts to obliterate this civilization, treated as a set of lifeless vestiges, a providential field for anthropologists and ethnographers seeking exoticism. Indeed, there were and there still are upright Orientalists, and—as we call them today—Islamologists above suspicion, but the fact is that the general utility of their works has often been spoilt, biased by unacceptable pre-existing ideologies, reflecting a vision that denies socio-historical realities, regarded as stilted only because the dominating ideology had decided so. . . .

A Timely Initiative

The good initiative was taken by my brother H.E. Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to proclaim the Year 2001, the United Nations Year for Dialogue among Civilizations, is particularly well-timed. It occurs, indeed, at a time when we wonder about the possibility to maintain a fertile and balanced dialogue among civilizations having very different levels of material development, and furthermore, within the reductive context of globalization.

Countries poor in resources but rich in culture could rightly fear that some of the ethic and social values they are attached to, and which had already suffered from the colonial

confiscation of history, be once again eroded or curtailed by the universalization of a one-dimension model deriving from materially prosperous countries. A model that does not meet all Man's dimensions in our countries, and no longer allows each to meet the Man in the other. A one-way model that changes authentic and convivial societies into schizophrenic societies of under-consumption.

Yet, it is from the industrialized countries that clamors arise and nourish an irrational fear of an alleged Green [Islamic] danger, replacing the Red or Yellow danger, which is said to constitute the main jeopardy for Western civilization's survival. One can find in the stock of concepts used to justify the inevitable clash between Western and Islamic civilizations, the use of stereotypes inspired by racist-oriented prejudice that would arouse indignation if applied to other ethnic groups. Forsaking the traditional condescending clichés regarding privacy in Islam, these stereotypes associate Islamic civilization with violence, terrorism, and fanaticism, to better fight it.

The dialogue among civilizations refers to the dialectics of the Singular and the Universal. The Koran gives it deep meaning when God, addressing his men, tells them: "O Men! We created males and females and We made peoples and tribes of you, so that you know each other." The Koran, by transcending the disparity of national and tribal formations, makes it precisely a reason and a motive of recognition of Man by Man. In this respect, to the motto of the Temple of Delphi, "Know yourself by yourself," should be added, "by knowing the Other." The identity of a culture, a civilization, as well as that of an individual, can only recognize itself, its originality, when compared to another culture, another civilization.

This is why, proclaiming the Year 2001 as the United Nations Year for Dialogue among Civilizations can be an opportunity to put on the spot extremists from the West claiming the inevitable clash between the two civilizations, and those in the Muslim world, who call for the Manichean division of the world into the "realm of Islam" (*Dar el Islam*), on the one hand, and the "realm of war" (*Dar el Harb*), on the other.

This proclamation is timely, as well, as it occurs in the wake of conflicts in eastern Europe, with their procession of atrocities which used the divergences between civilizations as a pretext. It is also to promote, throughout the world, an active and positive coexistence of the great religions in plural societies, rich in their diversity, but experiencing today tensions and hardships.

To initiate successfully a dialogue among civilizations, the following prerequisites are apparently required:

- First, the countries taking part in this dialogue should themselves be democratic countries. Otherwise, how can they seek to conciliate their differences with other countries, if they do not even manage to build on this dialogue at the

internal level?

- Moreover, these countries should acknowledge that there is no pure nor *sui generis* civilization, but each civilization is a river with the other civilization as tributaries; thus the necessity of its openness to the Universal, otherwise it is doomed to fall into decay.

In this context, the alleged opposition between so-called Judeo-Christian culture and Islamic culture ignores the harmonious coexistence of the religions of the Book, in Andalusia for instance, where they gave birth to an incomparable high civilization. Moreover, Western civilization today is no less Islamic-Christian than Judeo-Christian, if one takes into account the critical contribution of Muslim thinkers and scholars in the emergence of Western societies from the Middle Ages darkness, and later in the blossoming of the Renaissance.

- Furthermore, this dialogue must take place among nations. It has to involve the various components of society and its different age groups. It must not be confined to states alone, in order to ensure that the state's political power does not usurp the role of the nation as a whole.

- And last, it is necessary that this dialogue be a multifaceted one, comprising different fields of life, of which dialogue between religions is an integral part.

A Quest for Universality

At this point, Mr. President, it is useful to break with this narrow conception which considers, in international relationships, economic aspects only and ignores the problem of values that play a major role in people's imagination. Peoples who had historically known the grandeur of their nation through precious civilizational achievements, will not rest until they are recognized, reintegrated within the so-called civilized nations, and are no longer rejected, excluded, doomed to an unfair and humiliating misunderstanding. . . .

[E]ach nation . . . also participates, through dialogue, in a collective effort that would lead to a definition of a substratum of shared values, which would be from what we could generally describe as Universal Civilization, based not on their respective truths and justices, but on *The Truth* and *The Justice*.

The merit of the civilizations' dialogue lies in man's quest for his universality with the numerous expressions he has given himself throughout time and space. This is a genuine antidote for racism and all forms of discrimination. I would like to pay tribute to the initiative taken in this regard by the Secretary General and Mrs. Mary Robinson for the year 2001 — an effort to know oneself better by knowing the Other. In a word, an opportunity to deepen our humanity by recognizing it with full knowledge.

International ethics will benefit from this, and so will the cause of peace.