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## ‘Dialogue of Civilizations’

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# Rhodes Conference Works On New Basis For ‘Just, Compassionate, Humane Order’

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche

Some 350 delegates from 36 countries came together for four days on the history-laden island of Rhodes, in order to investigate the philosophical, spiritual, and moral foundations for a new and humane world order. Although the intellectuals, political leaders, theologians, artists, scientists, and economic experts were, in one sense, distant from day-to-day political affairs, they were nevertheless fully conscious of the gravity of the existential crisis facing humanity today, and they deliberated intensely on the spiritual basis which must be created, if the world is to avoid an otherwise certain Armageddon.

The World Public Forum’s “Dialogue of Civilizations” was organized by the Center of National Glory of Russia; the Titan Capital Corporation (Greece); and the Kapur Surya Foundation (India). The conference’s chairman, Vladimir Yakunin (Deputy Transport Minister of the Russian Federation), and co-chairman Yagdish Kapur (president of the Surya Foundation), along with Titan Corporation president N. Papanicolaou, acted as a well-coordinated team, and had laid the groundwork for the conference in a series of dialogues held earlier in India, Iran, and Russia.

Among the participants were several former heads of government, for example Inder Kumer Gujral from India, Milosz Zeman from the Czech Republic, and Valdas Adamkus from Lithuania. The leaders of the Russian and Greek Orthodox Churches were present with large delegations, as well as the most high-ranking religious leaders from Lebanon, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, and Serbia.

Over the past few years, quite a number of such conferences on a “Dialogue of Civilizations” have been held in response to the growing pressure of claims to unilateral power, along with the resulting warfare between civilizations. But what made this conference different, was not just its magnificent backdrop of the 14th-Century castle built by the Order of St. John, but more importantly, the spirit of the island of Rhodes, on which so many diverse cultures have left their mark during past millennia. The first settlements on Rhodes date back to the Neolithic period at about 1500 B.C., when the Minoans settled in the area around the ancient city of

Ialysos, while the Achaians spread throughout the island. Dorians began to colonize the island around 1100 B.C.

Rhodes’ golden period was during the Fifth and Third Centuries B.C., when it developed into a powerful economic and cultural center. In 57 B.C., the Apostle Paul landed there at a small port near the city of Lindos, and baptized the island’s first Christians. Later on, the island was conquered in successive waves by the Byzantine Empire, and by the Saracens and Arabs; it was occupied by the Crusaders, became part of the Ottoman Empire, was occupied by Italy, and finally, in 1948, became part of Greece.

According to Greek mythology, the island was named after the beautiful nymph Rhodos, daughter of the sea god Neptune and his wife Amphytrite. From the union of the nymph with the powerful sun god Helios, patron saint of the island, came seven offspring. The rich and diverse historical, mythological, and artistic representations, which can only be sketched briefly here, made the island of Rhodes a truly inspiring setting for this conference, whose aim was nothing less than achieving unity on the principles which will underlie a future, humane world order. The spirit of universal history was ever-present at the gathering.

The conference was organized into four plenary sessions and five panels, which, over three working days, dealt with various topical areas of the necessary dialogue: contemporary problems of international relations; prognoses for global economic development; matters pertaining to the dialogue among the world’s religions; current security problems; and the role of the media and film industry in the dialogue of cultures. The various speakers—each of them a *koryphaios* (spokesman for the chorus) in his or her field—illuminated the broad array of facets of the problems confronting humanity today.

Considering the great diversity in the speakers’ points of view, and the wide spectrum of topics, the draft text of the “Declaration of Rhodes” managed to represent the spirit uniting all participants: a deep distrust in the current world order’s scale of values, according to which the one side seeks to maintain a “consumer society by means of armed force,”



*Participants in the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” in Rhodes, Greece, gather before the 14th-Century castle where sessions took place. The author spoke on the contribution of Friedrich Schiller’s idea of the beautiful soul.*

while the other side believes it must seek its solution in terrorism. All participants were likewise united in their finding that the present world order is already inflicting intolerable damage upon humanity, plunging the absolute majority of the world’s inhabitants into awful poverty, while at the same time causing the accumulation of absurdly huge quantities of wealth into the hands of a relatively small group of the super-rich.

In order to counter the boundless and senseless appetite for material goods, and its allied counterculture glorifying dominance by force, the World Public Forum will henceforth work to unite the human being’s material side with his spiritual side. On the one hand, the idea of universal human rights—i.e., the right to food, housing, health care, education, clean air, and pure water—must be guaranteed for *all* people on this planet. But these material prerequisites must be developed alongside the human being’s spiritual side, into a unified and harmonious whole.

It is this prime focus of the conference, and the spirit of its declaration, which defined the theme of my own contribution to the first plenary session. I titled my speech, “Schiller’s Concept of the Beautiful Soul—A Contribution from German Classicism Toward a New Humane World Order,” because, of all Germany’s poets and thinkers, through his works Friedrich Schiller contributed the most to the harmonious development of the human personality. Especially his idea of the

Sublime—the concept that man must not locate his identity in the world of sense-perception and the material world, but rather, find immortality now in great ideas which portend the progress of all humanity—can be of great help today, in view of the present moral crisis, in overcoming the narrow world of materialism.

In the scope of this brief report, it is impossible to adequately describe the richness of the side-discussions sparked during the conference, and the numerous and manifold fruitful exchanges of ideas and plans. The conference’s atmosphere was extremely conducive to such a dialogue. The final meeting took place both in the chambers and in the inner courtyard of the castle built by the Order of St. John in the 14th Century. Conference chairman Yakunin set the tone in his opening speech, when he referred to his grandchildren, and said that the

future belongs to the children and the youth, and that this is why the dialogue of cultures must shape a better world for them. Yagdish Kapur concluded his own address with the same thought, that at future conferences, one-third of the participants will be young people.

The idea that humanity will only get out of this crisis if the best traditions of all cultures and civilizations are activated today, met with universal approval, and feeds the hope that a new renaissance of humanity is not far off. I therefore have nothing but agreement with Yakunin’s challenge to publish the Declaration of Rhodes, to see that it gets the broadest possible circulation.

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## Documentation

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### The Rhodes Declaration

*This declaration on “Dialogue of Civilizations For a Humane Order,” was issued at the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations” in Rhodes, Greece, on Sept. 3-6, 2003.*

The World Public Forum (WPF) has been constituted to bring

together a broad cross section of public, religious, academic, and political figures for the establishment of a “Dialogue of Civilizations.”

This was the outcome of a series of discussions held this year in Moscow and St. Petersburg (Russian Federation), in New Delhi (India), in Tehran (Iran), in Prague (Czech Republic), Athens (Greece), and Vilnius (Lithuania).

The aim of this dialogue is to discuss and elaborate such forms of the world community’s existence that could reinforce fundamental civilizational values and the inalienable human rights that would be capable of meeting the global threats and challenges.

The participants of the Forum reflected that the present world order, the established system of international relations, and its acting institutions do not provide complete implementation of the pressing human needs in security, in justice, and in qualitative improvement of life. This has led to expansion of enormous areas of human deprivation, to promotion of senseless desire for consumption and acquisition, to persistent attempts through the use of information technologies to bring not only economies, but also cultures, spirituality, moral and ethical norms to a single common denominator.

The participants of the Forum have paid special attention to the irreversible damage to the Institutions of International Peace and Security, due to unjustified use of violence against sovereignty, security, and culture of other nations, which results from the lopsided structure of the world.

To transform this state of affairs into a just, compassionate and humane order would require patience, sacrifice, and sustained action, to approach these problems of vast magnitude.

The satisfaction of the minimum basic needs for all—food, habitat, health, education, work environment, air and water—should be the first priority for all people of all countries, all the time. Yet the material, cultural, and spiritual consequences of the currently imposed paradigm of reckless consumption and its global spread become less and less acceptable because they serve the accumulation of affluence of a few countries and a small group of people while leading the vast part of the mankind to impoverishment and deprivation.

Ways should be found to break the unholy link, which generates internal and external compulsions to consumption, acquisition, and aggregation as the driving force of the New Global World Order. Society should glorify spiritual values and achievements. A cultural and spiritual counteroffensive is [a] need of the time.

Different indigenous cultures evolve into different civilizations. Therefore, the process of induced reduction of diverse cultures, as a part of globalization, into a single civilization model, is detrimental to the process of human evolution. A dialogue of faiths and cultures can freely and

creatively evolve only in the absence of a threat of cultural diversity being absorbed and assimilated into a single global standard.

The present globalization fixed on [the] material sphere and conducted in the interests of a small group of the rich developed countries without any ethical, moral, and value limitations, conducted without consideration for the interests of poor and developing countries, can be detrimental for the future of humanity. The New Global World Order forged by the unipolar power structure is a challenge to the true concept of human dignity and equality, and an affront to the freedom and sovereignty of nations.

So much damage has already been done to the human system, and it is being backed by so much military power, that this state of affairs cannot be transformed instantly. We have first to mediate, seek peaceful, non-violent and orderly solutions, which will fire the imaginations of vast society of people worldwide, to direct a trend towards a humane future for all. But the time scales for change will vary from one nation to another with the possible advantages for those with lesser damage from the present paradigm.

To seek long-term perspective requires a prophetic vision. But understanding of short and medium term objectives of world development would require a search for new cognition models needed to find an adequate response by different civilizations to challenges of the time.

The essence of this response is in defending the human freedom to develop within the frame of their own culture and territory, their own resources and needs. An innovative civilizational project, which embraces all aspects of material, cultural, and spiritual growth, is required.

The search for that humane future must evolve to alteration of the material world, where we live, where our modern civilizations exist. Otherwise humanity will forever continue in a state of rapid drift towards an Armageddon.

The present Forum is just a beginning of a large process that brings people and nations belonging to different civilizations closer to each other.

The participants of the Forum have unanimously decided to continue the serious discussion about the destiny of humanity that started on the island of Rhodes. This discussion should become a substantial factor of the international situation. Practical implementation of the stated goals can be achieved through a series of joint projects especially in cultural, educational, and ecological spheres.

The participants and delegates of the Forum have decided to establish a permanently acting International Coordination Committee (ICC) of the World Public Forum “Dialogue of Civilizations.”

The Rhodes Forum calls public organizations, legislative and executive bodies of governments, academic institutions and research centers, scholars, and thinkers to widely discuss our proposals.