Inter-Agency Platform on Culture and Sustainable Development (IPCSD)

Second Thematic Workshop Report

Culture for Dialogue and Peace

7 December 2021 – online meeting

Participants:

UN Agencies

1. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) – Ms Johanne Bouchard
2. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) – Ms Marisa Henderson; Ms Carolina Quintana
3. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) – Faith for Earth initiative – Mr Euan Mccartney
4. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – Ms Ina Lambert
5. UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) – Mr Stylianos Kostas
6. United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) – Ms Pegah Zohouri Haghian

Regional and interregional IGOs and Development Banks

1. Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) – Ms Asanti Astari
2. European Commission (EC) – Mr Angelos Agalianos
3. Inter-American Development Bank – Ms Trinidad Zaldivar Peralta; Mr Francisco Jose Joel Castro y Ortiz
4. Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) – Ms Cristina Calleja; Ms Elisa Canteuso

Context:

- *Peace* is at the core of the UN mandate; it cuts across the UN 2030 Agenda and it is explicitly mentioned in SDG 16 – *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*. SDG 16 addresses issues of conflicts and insecurity; but also, the enactment of human rights, access to justice, social services and information.
- One of the 12 areas of action identified in *Our Common Agenda* report refers precisely “to promote peace and prevent conflict”, which is particularly relevant for culture.
- *Culture* is a powerful force that brings people together, underpinning social cohesion, peace and security. Notwithstanding this unifying function, the past 20 years have witnessed a growing instrumentalization of culture for divisive purposes. This exploitation of culture has
not only contributed to more protracted crises and relapses into conflict, but also the denial of human rights. **Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights**, from access to culture, to participation in cultural life and enjoying respect of fundamental freedoms, including artistic freedom and freedom of expression should continue to be upheld and advocated for a cornerstone in our increasingly multicultural societies.

- **The magnitude, length and complexity of conflicts** are growing contemporary features. **Mobility and forced displacements** of populations are posing challenges to the **governance of cultural diversity and to the peaceful coexistence** of different cultures and diverse communities within countries, as well as, in some cases, between countries. **Stereotyping, intolerance, discrimination, and misinformation** are being used or witnessed – often using culture as a dividing feature rather than a unifying force - to create tensions, as well as to disrupt the fabric of societies. An extreme manifestation of this is rooted in the intentional destruction of cultural heritage or the disruption of living heritage practices, such as music for example.

- **Culture’s role in conflict prevention and reconciliation must be fully acknowledged and should be systematically integrated into UN actions with a view to promoting unity and social cohesion. This resonates deeply with the UN Secretary General’s pledge for a more systematic focus on conflict prevention.**

**Key messages:**

**Upholding culture for conflict prevention and mitigation**

- **International legal and regulatory frameworks in humanitarian contexts and conflict-affected areas** which also integrate the culture dimension should be expanded, advocated for and further explored to enforce application mechanisms and legal prospects under humanitarian law with the consent of parties involved in the conflict.

- **Data and evidence to measure the impact of culture on peace and dialogue are key**, especially to link qualitative and quantitative data on culture to national and international data on conflicts and tensions. Measuring the impact and evidence of culture in prevention efforts and in conflict resolution remains complex and UN institutions should joint forces in developing joint analysis and streams of work in that direction.

- **Synergies between education and culture in educational systems - from young age but also through lifelong learning and non-formal education - are essential to promote respect for cultural diversity to build more peaceful and inclusive societies from early age.** Pedagogical approaches for the development of intercultural competencies and intercultural education should be shared across the broad spectrum of the UN system to harness education in culture-related institutions and vice versa; as well as to highlight the cultural dimension of the right to education and the role of education for the upholding of cultural rights. Enhancing synergies between culture and education is essential to strengthen strategies to learn to live, respect human rights and cultural diversity to bolster inclusive societies.

- **Interreligious dialogue can contribute to harness culture for peacebuilding.** Religious groups and heritage sites of religious significance are often a target in armed conflicts. Involving religious communities, leaders and mediators in decision making and conflict prevention and resolution – including through the management of heritage sites– is fundamental to support global advocacy for peace building and sustainable development.
Job creation is a tool to reduce poverty and for peace building, especially for youth and refugees. Poverty and marginalization may exacerbate exclusion and divides leading to tensions and violent extremism. Training, building intercultural competencies, – including through TVET can foster new skills, innovation and employment: in particular, the cultural and creative industries have the potential to connect poverty reduction with entrepreneurship.

The importance of citizens’ participation in culture is an important tool to foster civic and democratic values and global citizenship; nurturing evidence-based policies for good governance. Specific areas of interest on the linkages between culture and civic engagement are the role of cultural and artistic practices in public spaces; as well as the digital inclusion of minorities and marginalized groups to foster access to culture, intercultural skills, and giving a sense of purpose.

Harnessing culture for reconciliation, reconstruction and for restorative justice

Training and capacity building on the cultural dimension is particularly relevant for mediation purposes, including for the protection of cultural heritage; equally, the rehabilitation of cultural heritage damaged by conflicts should be regarded as a fundamental component for reconstruction and national reconciliation in conflict-affected areas. Rehabilitation actions should also apply to natural heritage sites, engaging local communities in their preservation to strengthen the linkages between culture, environmental sustainability and peace.

Natural hazards and extreme natural events linked to climate change can also undermine peace and stability, bringing economic and non-economic losses which often trigger forced displacements and migration.

Culture-led peacebuilding initiatives that engage all segments of society, notably the most vulnerable, are fundamental both in host communities and in countries of origin of migrants and displaced populations. Synergies between intangible cultural heritage, arts education and sports represent an effective combination that fosters intercultural dialogue, social inclusion, and improves youth livelihoods in urban migration areas.

Cultural heritage and museums can play an important role in facilitating the inclusion of vulnerable people and communities, such as persons with disabilities, seniors, youth and indigenous peoples enabling a better understanding of cultural diversity and fostering transmission of cultural and heritage values, identities and memory that can help regain self-confidence.

Efforts to ensure that conflicts do not target culture will require the enhancement and implementation of cultural rights and leveraging culture and education. In this framework, history teaching, cultural heritage and living heritage practices can provide powerful tools for respect, mutual appreciation of cultural diversity and foster, cultural participation, social inclusion, and access.

Key initiatives:

OHCHR and UNESCO: the Art Lab for Human Rights and Dialogue is a laboratory of artistic interventions, which highlights the social role of artists in processes of memory and reconciliation, and, hence, in promoting human rights, dignity and artistic freedom. Such a pilot could develop into a more systemic strategy to foster arts education as a means to strengthen
resilience, social inclusion and the appreciation of cultural diversity while promoting creativity, free expression and participation.

- **UNESCO**: Statement on the protection of religious properties within the framework of the World Heritage Convention. Developed in close collaboration with national authorities, international experts, site managers and representatives of religious communities provides concrete recommendations and guidance to enhance knowledge and action for the protection of sites of religious significance. Equally, UNESCO recently endorsed the "Heritage for Peace" programme aims at promoting actions to protect cultural heritage from a holistic perspective (all dimensions) during peacetime, armed conflict and in post-conflict situations.

- **UNHCR**: Religions for Peace and UNHCR have partnered around the multi-religious council of leaders to strengthen collective efforts of religious leaders across regions and faiths to address root causes of division by supporting global advocacy, conflict prevention, reconciliation, peacebuilding and social cohesion initiatives. Equally, UNHCR has been strengthening inclusion and peaceful coexistence through community cinema and digital media with refugee youth and host communities.

- **EU Commission**: the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC) has launched an independent study on links between culture and democracy, namely on “The Importance of Citizen Participation in Culture for Civil Engagement and Democracy”.

- **UNDESA**: has produced a compendium of national policies and initiatives on the role of sports for peace-building Sport for Development and Peace.

- **UNEP**: in the framework of the Faith for Earth initiative is uniting religions around the world to focus on environmental issues, bridging and peacebuilding to environmental security.

- **UNFCCC**: “The Executive Committee of the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage” has established an expert group working on non-economic losses related to the adverse impacts of climate change, an entry point to explore ways in which climate-related events impact health, mobility, culture, and other societal issues are relating to conflicts and tensions.

**Follow-up:**

1. The Report of the Second Workshop will be sent to the Members of the Platform for comments and published on the website. Members are invited to send the links of initiatives, written contributions and publications on the theme to be included in the Report and mainstreamed on the IPCSD website. Keeping a track of the concrete examples and initiatives mentioned during the Workshops is essential to identify good practices and collect data; but also missing elements and strategic priorities for cooperation and mutual learning in the framework of the Platform.

2. The third and last Thematic Workshop will take place on 26 January (Culture and Climate Action) respectively. UNESCO will send a reminder to all IPCSD members in due time.

3. A global feedback session will be held in March 2022, which will also be opportunity to discuss steps forward to explore synergies at planning and implementation level towards enhancing UN common approach and delivery under the IPCSD. The meeting in March will also provide space for discussing other thematic areas related to IPCSD to deepen specific aspects or sub-themes touched upon during the meetings (e.g. bolstering data and evidence on culture and inequalities).
4. UNESCO will draft a Report on the outcomes of the three workshops to be circulated to all members for their comments as relevant. The report could also lay prospects for reflection towards a joint initiative in the framework of the UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies – Mondiacult 2022, which will be hosted by the Government of Mexico in September 2022.