



Report by the Secretary General

Plus the views received from member parliaments

Submitted to the Meeting of the Sub-Committee of
The APA Social and Cultural Committee on

Protecting and Respecting Cultural Diversity in Asia

Background

In 2006 APA Plenary decided to establish a working group to prepare a Plan of Action for Protecting and Respecting Cultural Diversity in Asia. In 2007, after this Plan of Action was discussed by the APA Executive Council and certain modifications were made, the Plenary adopted the text of the Plan of Action by passing the Resolution APA/Res/2007/02.

In that Resolution, the APA Plenary decided to establish a Sub-Committee under the Cultural and Social Committee to consider the best ways and means to facilitate the implementation of provisions of the Plan of Action on Cultural Diversity in Asia. The Plenary further requested the Secretary General to prepare a report for consideration of the Sub-Committee.

To fulfill this mandate, the Secretary General communicated and consulted with APA Member Parliaments to identify interested members to this sub-committee, as well as to give their views and suggestions on the priorities and projects that they regard the most appropriate and urgent. In line with such consultations and based on the text of the Plan of Action, the Secretary General wishes to make the following suggestions for consideration of the Sub-Committee.



A- Cultural Challenges of Globalization

The globalization process and its negative impact on cultural identities is increasingly threatening Asian societies as well as the world cultural diversity due to its universal demand for global cultural homogenization. It seems no country is immune from globalization, yet the point is how to strike a balance between the so-called global culture and different cultural identities. Globalization in its cultural manifestations is continuously changing the human attitude toward life and death, prosperity and salvation, social relationships, human nature and communal life styles; thus threatening long lasting traditions and well rooted identities. To study different dimensions of such changes, and to make practical recommendations for active participation in the global processes in order to protect Asian cultural identities require critical and deep evaluation of the status quo and the prevalent forward-looking trend.

For this, it is advisable to hold a critical and brain storming conference in Asia with high level participation of intellectuals, parliamentarians and policy makers. The goal of this conference is to critically review different cultural dimensions of globalization and to formulate policies to seize opportunities and actively face challenges of globalization. The result of such deliberations will be reported to the Social and Cultural Committee for further consideration and action.

B- Citizenship Rights and Cultural Diversity

In order to protect and promote cultural and value systems of different communities, cultural rights should be differentiated from individual rights. It is imperative to recognize that every person is entitled to enjoy prosperity within his/her own specific culture, free from humiliation, degradation, marginalization and suppression. This cultural rights is an integral part of citizenship rights which is rooted in the cultural, historical and national characteristics of each Asian nations.

There are two different approaches in cultural discourses: one considers cultural rights as part of individual rights, and the other regards them as an integral part of citizenship rights. To protect and promote cultural diversity in Asia gravely depends on the position that APA may take in regard to these two approaches.



This cultural discourse has both intellectual implications and practical applications. Thus the Secretary General deems it appropriate to hold a brain-storming conference in Asia with high level participation of intellectuals, parliamentarians and policy makers to critically review different cultural dimensions of individual, as well as citizenship rights and to formulate policies that best promote cultural rights and protect diversity.

C- Cultural Diversity and Economic Development

Asia as a continent with the greatest cultural and spiritual heritage, and with the most speedy economic growth rate is indeed facing a challenge; how to strike a balance between development and culture? With regard to the relationship between culture and economy there are two competing approaches. First, the developmental approach which pays little attention, if any, to various traditions and life styles of different communities. Second, the cultural approach that regards due attention to cultural context as the most appropriate ground for economic development. The first approach, in practice, not only has failed to produce a sustainable development, but has also generated social and cultural disparities and conflicts. In the second approach, development itself is regarded as an integral part of social and cultural life and in close interaction and collaboration with its social contexts. In this way, a balanced and interactive relationship between economic development and cultural diversity may emerge.

Thus, it is imperative to pay special attention to the relationship between development and culture, particularly in societies with rapid economic growth rate. The Secretary General would like to propose to the Sub-Committee to discuss this issue with high priority. For this, it is advisable to hold regional workshops with the aim of studying different experiences and identifying the best policies and practices of each region. Through such exchange of experiences the most suitable modality for each region can be defined. The Sub-Committee would suggest these modalities to the Main Committee for its consideration and then through it to the APA plenary for final approval.

D- Asia a Cultural Continent

To facilitate integration in Asia requires a common Asian understanding as well as a solid cultural ground for cooperation and coordination among Asian nations. Cultural exchanges consolidate Asian solidarity and integration.



Thus it is necessary to design short, medium, and long term cultural programs aimed at promoting cultural integration in Asia. Such programs may include:

- Production of short movies about the role of Asia in human civilization and the significance of Asian integration,
- Holding annual film festival with the aim of introducing different proper grounds for Asian integration,
- Holding Asian cultural festivals in music, theater, etc,
- Promoting tourism among Asian nations,
- Facilitating consulate services for citizens of Asian countries.

To begin with, the Secretariat of APA suggests to hold annual competition and to award prize to the best movie in Asia that supports Asian integration.

E- Combat Smuggling of Cultural Items

Asia as the most ancient civilization in the world with the richest cultural heritage has always been the victim of smuggling of its cultural items. To combat such anti-cultural phenomenon requires close cooperation among all Asian countries. Transparent laws and regulations for protecting cultural items constitute the most important aspect of this campaign.

Therefore APA should take certain steps in order to remove legal loopholes in trafficking cultural items. First the existing rules and regulations on this particular matter should be reviewed. Second, the Sub-Committee may wish to undertake drafting and proposing a common legislation among Asian nations to combat smuggling of cultural items. After the approval of the Social and Cultural Committee it will be forwarded to the Plenary for adoption. Then it is advisable to request national parliaments to pass this legislation within appropriate time duration.

This coordinated campaign in Asia would pave the way for a better integration and helps to protect cultural diversity and Asian solidarity.



F- APA Cooperation with International Cultural Institutions

At international and regional levels there are several institutions operating in cultural, educational and artistic fields. It is imperative for APA to concentrate on innovative and neglected areas of cultural activities and avoid repeating or reproducing what have already been done by others. Thus the Secretariat should establish an effective working relationship with institutions such as UNESCO and ISESCO in order to exchange views and experiences leading to joint actions and projects.

If the Sub-Committee supports this proposal, the Secretariat would review and study the core cultural programs of these institutions and identify the specific areas of cooperation. Based on such findings, a report will be prepared by the Secretary General to be submitted to the next meeting of the Sub-Committee in 2009.

G- Establishment of an Asian Cultural Foundation:

Cultural issues are not confined to official or governmental activities but embrace all walks of societies and underpin the life style of all communities. To coordinate cultural activities at the continent level, it is advisable to establish a Non-Governmental Cultural Foundation through networking among active cultural foundations in Asia or/and with the participation of Asian prominent cultural figures as its board of trustee. Though this Foundation would operate as an NGO, it would have the support and blessing of Asian Parliaments and Governments.

The Secretary General is prepared to present a feasibility study report on this proposal. Such report may contain vision and mission statements, long and short term goals, structural and managerial requirements as well as terms of reference and methods of conduct.

G- Dialogue among Asian Religions

Asia has been the origins of great religions and majority of believers in the world live in Asia. This provides a unique opportunity for Asia to take initiative measures to enhance dialogue and understanding among believers. Promotion of constructive dialogue among Asian religions is imperative for removing stereotypes and negative images to paves the way for common understanding toward integration. Based on theology and belief systems religions in Asia may be classified into two main groups; Abrahamian and



Non-Abrahamic. Abrahamic Religions rooted in the teachings of Prophet Abraham and continued in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. The second contains ancient Asian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism and Taoism.

Dialogue among religions may be conducted in several ways. However, the most relevant one for APA is focusing on basic contemporary issues in order to compare the ways that Asian religions are responding to modern challenges. How religions and traditions in Asia has encountered modernity and globalization. To address such a great challenge, it is imperative to conduct fruitful and serious dialogue on significant issues such as:

- 1- Human dignity and human rights
- 2- Peace and friendship
- 3- Justice and equity
- 4- Social relationships (family, generational gap)

The result of such interfaith dialogue would provide common understanding and narrow the divide among believers in facing modern challenges.

To utilize the existing institutions dealing with interfaith dialogue in Asia, it was proposed to the Secretary General to study the possibility to establish a working relationship between the APA and the “Asian Conference of Religions for Peace” (ACRP). This organization is an interfaith body consisting of religious representatives from 16 Asian countries founded in Singapore in 1976. ACRP will hold its 7th General Assembly at Manila Philippines on Oct 17-22 2008. The Secretary General of ACRP has invited members of the APA to participate in the coming General Assembly. Based on such findings and in line with the APA recommendations the Secretary General would present a report to suggest an effective and relevant mechanism for interfaith dialogue in Asia.



Annex

Views received from Member Parliaments

Views received from Mr. Sunggon Kim
Member of Parliament of Korea, APA Representative of MP of Korea

17 July 2008

I want to point out something missing in your report. I fully agree with you that we Asians need to keep cultural identity under the threat of globalization and economic development. At the same time, you stress the Asian solidarity and integration and recommend the various way of cultural exchange among Asian countries. But I want to point out that not only the solidarity of Asian but also the solidarity of humankind as a whole is important. We should protect of the cultural identity of Asian from the threat of globalization, but we also should protect the humankind and our planet as a whole under the crisis of total annihilation.

Globalization and economic development in modern time are the products of the modern science and mass product which originates mainly in the West. Along with this material power, many Western countries (including Japan) colonized Asian and African countries politically, economically, and culturally. Even after their political independence, Asian and African people are under the influence of Western economy and culture.

This is the process of globalization which threatens the uniqueness of Asian culture. For Asian people now, like the people in other capitalistic society, money and goods have become the primary object of worship. Here people, whether Asian or non-Asian, lost their human nature (or divine nature), which is the most serious crisis caused by globalization and economic development. People worship money rather than God.

Moreover, globalization and economic development has devastate our environment. The earth is the only planet we human beings can live. But, due to the climate change caused by the increasing production of CO₂, rising sea levels may engulf many cities and many creatures face annihilation. Polarization and food crisis is also a serious byproduct of globalization. The poor becomes poorer and the rich becomes richer. Billions people, especially

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in Asia and Africa, are suffering through poverty, disease, shortage of water, food and energy.

Asia is the continent of the origin of the most important spiritual tradition such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. These great world religions have taught people how to recover our human nature, how to achieve the true happiness, and how to live together with the poor and other creatures on earth. I am sure this is the most important heritage of Asian culture which can heal the suffering of humankind. The modern mankind should find a solution of the crisis in these spiritual traditions, which is a forgotten truth while people worship money and goods.

Due to the rapid economic development and globalization, the balance between material civilization and spiritual civilization has broken, and the result is the suffering of humankind. But through rediscovery of the spiritual heritage of Asia, we can heal our sick civilization. This is the role of Asian culture to save the humankind in crisis. It is important to keep the cultural diversity of Asia and build up the Asian solidarity. But it is more important to find a solution of the survival of humankind in the cultural heritage of Asia. Now we Asia have the answer to save our earth and humankind.

Thank you. Sincerely Yours

Sunggon Kim,
Member of Parliament of Korea.
APA Representative of MP of Korea