

THE JAVIER DECLARATION

Preamble

We, the participants of the First Asia-Europe Youth Interfaith Dialogue held in Navarra, Spain, from the 19th to the 22nd November 2006, having discussed experiences, perspectives and practices on the four topics of:

1. Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue,
2. Socio-Religious Conflict and Conflict Resolution,
3. Education for Inter-Religious Understanding and Appreciation, and
4. Religion in the Media,

affirm the need for growing and sustaining youth interfaith dialogue, and have decided to promote and work towards the following:

In the Field of Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue

1. Recognise that dialogue is a very important and an essential part of building bridges between religions and cultures, and is the first step in deepening interfaith and intercultural relations.
2. Recognise the need for dialogue to be inclusive of all faiths, religions and world views, including those of secularism and atheism.
3. Recognise that the ultimate goal of dialogue is deeper awareness, understanding, respect, love and sustainable world peace. Dialogue should also include issues that affect not only humans but also all other forms of life on earth.
4. Dialogue should be conducted in a safe and open environment of mutual trust and respect, and to gain knowledge and wisdom through discussion, sharing and negotiation that is open-minded and non-judgemental.
5. Recognise youth as a unique stage of human development that requires education, exposure, and participation in social life, as well as appropriate approaches and strategies to engage them in dialogue.
6. Recognise the need to encourage and inspire youth to engage in dialogue but always without compulsion.
7. Recognise that sufficient resources and expertise should be made available for effective and meaningful dialogue.
8. Recognise that the involvement of government, NGOs, grassroots organisations, and religious and community leaders is essential in dialogue, because they empower youth and because they are stakeholders in this process.

9. Recognise that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights provides a common ground and a good and efficient basis to start a dialogue.

On Socio-religious Conflict and Conflict Resolution

1. Acknowledge the connection between inner conflict or fear and outer conflict, and between inner peace or lack of fear and outer peace.
2. Identify the purely cultural ingredients of certain allegedly religious practices.
3. Empower self-examination and internal dialogue within faith communities in general and amongst their youth in particular, in the face of increasingly diverse societies.
4. Make room for plural, truly representative leadership at all levels of faith communities.
5. Favour preventive trust-building through interfaith encounter and understanding at all levels (leaders, youth, etc.), including the voice of the non-religious.
6. Respect and celebrate diversity in the public sphere through events and various other ways, such as a government-sponsored “Multicultural and Multireligious Week”.
7. Foster comprehensive understanding of socio-religious conflicts and identify the misuse of religion in conflicts which have non-religious sources.
8. In dealing with conflicts, stress common concerns and shared values. Support initiatives of youth which show practical solidarity with people in conflict-ridden areas.
9. Train internationally acknowledged mediators and set up protocols to deal with socio-religious conflicts and inter-religious relations.

On Education for Inter-religious Understanding and Appreciation

Recognise three levels of education and the importance of their links and networks.

At the Intergovernmental Level

1. Promote co-operation between UN, ASEM, EU, APEC and ASEAN+3 international bodies, and between civil society and government, to create spaces for international activities for inter-religious dialogue in education.

In National Education Policies

1. Governments should acknowledge the importance of teaching inter-religious education in schools, especially at elementary and secondary levels.
2. Encourage governments to declare their commitment to long-term inter-religious education beyond its use as a problem-fixing tool, to prevent conflict and to appreciate other religions.
3. Ensure that inter-religious education is being promoted and implemented across the whole population. This includes educating the educators, especially parents, teachers, religious leaders and youth leaders.
4. Ensure opportunities for interaction between students of different beliefs in mixed schools.
5. Review and update text books on religions and inter-religious dimensions and issues.

Local Educational Policies and Curriculum Development

Local Education Policies

1. Develop clear school policies on potentially controversial issues, such as attendance at religious celebrations in schools, provision of time-off and holidays for every religion, channels to address religious injustices, and the wearing of religious items.
2. Update libraries with sections on inter-religious dialogue and world religions.

Curriculum Development

1. Enrich religious education with inter-religious dimensions.
2. Define the goals of inter-religious education clearly.
3. Encourage the teaching of the major world religions and, depending on context, also minority and indigenous religions.
4. Teach both differences and similarities, especially through dialogue.
5. Teach past and contemporary historical aspects of religion to address the misunderstandings between religions, especially conflicts that have occurred in the name of religion.
6. Encourage constructive self-awareness and self-criticism of one's own religion.

7. Teach the cultural contexts of religion, such as through inter-disciplinary learning using history and literature.
8. Include the understanding of secularism in the teaching of religion.
9. Avoid stereotyping of religions.
10. Promote anti-discrimination, inclusion, listening and understanding, appreciation of differences, common citizenship, and living according to moral, ethical and spiritual values.
11. Enable students to acquire skills to deal with conflict, suffering and violence that have taken place in the name of religion.
12. Undertake project-based learning which includes:
 - visits to different places of worship and different religious communities.
 - exchanges among students of different religions.
 - creating spaces for dialogue among students.
 - activities about different festivities.
 - inviting different religious practitioners for dialogues in class.
13. Use multimedia tools and the arts to promote inter-religious education and interests.

For Religious Groups and NGOs

1. Lobby the government to ensure that the commitment for inter-religious education is kept.
2. Create activities in NGOs and faith communities that will develop interest in inter-religious dialogue.
3. Create spaces for religious leaders to deepen their expertise and experiences in inter-religious dialogue and collaboration.
4. Tap on the informal aspects of education for inter-religious education, especially through youth centres.
5. Recognise the importance of the family as a basis for inter-religious education and dialogue.

On Religion in the Media

1. Establish general standards and guidelines for the media industry, so that they will:
 - Be respectful of all sacred representations of religions and refrain from misuse, distortion and misrepresentation of them.
 - Report from a neutral and objective point of view, and not abuse topics on religions for commercial or political agendas.

- Have a clear differentiation between information and opinions.
 - Have a sound and holistic knowledge of all world religions.
 - Assume the responsibilities and roles of mediating conflicts caused by the media when such crises arise.
 - Set up a working group which will involve both media and religious representatives, to deal with the reporting of religious issues.
2. Religions and their institutions should take a more active part in:
 - Creating more space in the media for religious youth to express themselves in constructive debate and dialogue.
 - Establishing positive relationships with the media industry in order to allow an open communication based on respect and understanding.
 - Tapping the potential of the media as a tool of education about religions and prevention of conflicts.
 3. Youth should continue to be active participants in the media world, be mindful of the effects of media, and be responsible individuals in disseminating information to the masses.

Conclusion

We recognise the need to ensure timely, sustained and effective implementation of steps towards achieving the above. Towards this end,

1. We urge the ASEM governments to co-operate with and to support civil society, including youth, in the implementation of the above recommendations.
2. We acknowledge the efforts of the Asia-Europe Foundation in the promotion of better understanding between Asia and Europe, and we favour the reinforcement of its role as an interface for dialogue and co-operation.

We thank Casa Asia and the Asia-Europe Foundation for organising this dialogue, as well as the Government of Navarra for hosting the dialogue with warmth and hospitality and for making it possible.

Pamplona and Javier (Navarra), Spain
22 November 2006