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The Baku Forum on Intercultural Dialogue and Cultural Diversity

Effenus Henderson

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THE BAKU FORUM

LIVING TOGETHER PEACEFULLY IN A DIVERSE WORLD

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2ND WORLD FORUM ON INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND DIVERSITY - BAKU, AZERBAIJAN

Briefing and Report of Proceedings

Effenus Henderson
Chief Diversity Officer
Weyerhaeuser
The Baku Forum - 2013

OVERVIEW

Under the patronage of His Excellency, Mr. Ilham Aliyev, President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ms. Irina Bokova, Director General of UNESCO, Mr. Nassir Abdulazizi Al-Nasser, UN High Representative for the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations and Mr. Abdulazzi Ottoman Altwaijri, Director General of ISESCO I was invited to participate in the 2nd World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue and Diversity.

The Baku Forum addressed the challenges of intercultural dialogue in its various aspects regarding conceptual frameworks, governance, policy and practice. It tackled the barriers to dialogue and provided a forum for conversation on how dialogue can best be pursued in diverse contexts. The forum also provided an opportunity to share best practices and launch new initiatives within this intercultural platform. Over 500 representatives from 102 countries and from all continents attended the forum.

I was honored at being asked to speak and share ideas on the role of the corporate sector in promoting intercultural dialogue and diversity.

Effenus Henderson

This event demonstrates diversity and inclusion in the modern world,” he said. “This is a very necessary compass concerning the prevention of xenophobia and marginalization. Unfortunately, there is still intolerance of one nation to another in some parts of the world. This phenomenon is very dangerous.” “Preventing this is an important task for the leaders of each society,” he said. “We call for the president’s responsible attitude to this issue. The Alliance of Civilizations which is important has been created to prevent such events. The media, business sector and civil society must participate there. The new mentality and a new attitude to diversity will create a new reality.” “I hope that what we will discuss in Baku will be reflected worldwide,” he said.

UN High Representative the Alliance of Civilizations – Nassir Abdulazizi Al-Nasser
BEYOND TOLERANCE – THE DEDICATION OF THE NEW CENTER IN BAKU

I took part in the opening of the National Tolerance Center which will be devoted to research and study of ways to go beyond tolerance to building more diverse and inclusive societies. The opening remarks and the video shared by the organizers were informative and progressive.

Key highlights included:

The international presentation of the National Tolerance Center took place as part of the 2nd International Forum on Intercultural Dialogue in Baku on Wednesday. Chairman of the State Committee for Work with Religious Organizations Elshad Isgandarov shared the main goals of the center.

"The work of the center is based on a history of coexistence of peoples, spirituality and development of Islam in the geography of Azerbaijan as a bridge between the East and the West," he said.

"The major goals of the center are to create and promote a harmonious society through mutual understanding, mutual respect for all religions and cultures, and support ideas and activities that promote inter-religious dialogue and respect."

Tolerance was defined as finding value and respecting the differences that others bring to a given situation.

Presenters discussed ways to create a more cohesive global society characterized by inter-religious collaboration, mutual respect, and harmonious relationships. Understanding the importance of the Tolerance Center as a way to share, generate and support ideas leading to more unity for respect.

The underlying principles focus on mutual respect, cross cultural understanding, valuing different backgrounds, religions and cultures.
THE OVERARCHING STRATEGY

“Globalization has brought the world closer together, distance between places have seemingly become shorter. As a result, people interact with cultural difference on a daily basis. In order to address some of the pressing issues of modern day life, it is vital to be able to navigate global networks.

Intercultural dialogue is important in meeting these challenges. It helps recognition that difference exists, and addresses the need to encourage mutual trust and understanding between diverse people. The environment in which intercultural dialogue take place is marked by difference, proximity and interconnectedness.”

-- FROM THE CONFERENCE BOOKLET
BUILDING PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND DIVERSITY CRITICAL

A major focus of the forum was on raising the level of understanding at both the strategic and tactical level on the importance of diversity in dialogue.

The focus was on building public support (why is it important to increase the understanding and support for diversity by civil society and the public?). Key thoughts about the process:

- involve more ordinary people
- build a constituency and more tools
- identify and mobilize champions
- proselytize and argue the case
- mainstream public involvement
- enhance and grow the involvement and engagement of women, youth and civil society in the development of strategy and tactics
- consider the long-term nature of the process

KEY POINTS:

1. It is important to build the constituency for cultural diversity (one tactic is the Do one Thing for Diversity Campaign). The goal is to understand the convergence of Islamic influence, infused by learning about another culture.

   A key mindset is to think of “everyone as diverse, but that each of us makes it inclusive by consideration of our actions and behaviors.”

2. Building an inclusive society is all about education. We continue to teach our youth in the traditional ways as we did in the past century. We have to move to an era when we are holding leaders accountable for education that reflects changing times.

3. The corporate sector is very important to the achievement of the desired outcomes. Business has been able to develop effective strategies and best practices for diversity and inclusion, especially global corporations. They have been winning at building more diversity within business and we must learn from their experiences.
LINKAGE AND CONNECTION TO POST-2015 UN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDA

It was suggested that the Post 2015 Global Development Agenda being developed by the United Nations should fully integrate cultural dialogue and diversity as a strategic pillar.

Many of the issues expressed in the Global Compact such as sustainable development, global warming, and societal peace cannot not be fully achieved without considering the cultural history, legacy and perspectives that the peoples of the world bring to table.

The new agenda must continue to be aligned with Global Compact’s Millennium Development Goals as well as UNESCO’s guidance of Cultural Diversity.

Some key focus areas:

- Adequate input from private sector and economic corridors
- Increased focus on education (isn't just for children in schools)
- Direct linkage of diversity and inclusion actions / outcomes to the global agenda
- Strengthen the involvement of young people
- Enhance the dialogue among the current champions
- Ensure the development and use of effective tools for intercultural dialogue
- Assess the diversity within the organization leading the change not just the diversity “outside the room.”

The voices of our youth must be an intentional strategy to build more inclusive societies. They must be active participants and agents of the change process. We must prepare the youth to live in a multicultural world. We must educate them on the value of tolerance and coexistence, and respect for others.

Respect and consideration for religious diversity is important. Religion is an important dimension of cultures and social cohesion and democracy. We must learn to respect different religious beliefs. This is important in promoting social cohesion.
CULTURAL COMPETENCY AND UNDERSTANDING OF LOCAL HISTORY AND CUSTOMS

IMPORTANT

At the core of the work of inclusive societies is the challenge of living with the "other."

It is important to understand the historical background of the country of Azerbaijan as a model for promoting cultural diversity in other places around the world. Azerbaijan is a nation which represents a variety of religious and ethnic backgrounds. It is a secular republic in the heart of the Muslim world.

Cultural traditions and history within the context of the home country must be a part the review.

"Baku, along with its role of a geographical bridge, also serves as an intercultural bridge," Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said in his speech.

He said "Azerbaijan is one of the unique places where different cultures and civilizations meet at the crossroad between the East and the West, the North and the South."

At the same time, being a member of both Islamic and European organizations Azerbaijan absorbs the values of both civilizations, thus enabling it to assume a role of genuine bridge.

"Baku, along with its role of a geographical bridge, also serves as an intercultural bridge," Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said in his speech.
LEADERS AT ALL LEVELS MUST DIRECT THE TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESS

Participants talked about the important role of leadership. The general consensus was that global leader in all sectors (government, private industry, NGOs, Religion, and Civil Society must lead the transformational process.

The engagement and commitment of a growing number of Prime Ministers and government officials at the forum, especially from countries such as Brazil, Jordan, Ivory Coast, etc.), was encouraging.

There was overwhelming support for creating a growing world movement to support cultural diversity and a desire to see it elevated on the global agenda alongside sustainable development, climate change, etc.

Participants underscored the importance of leadership in galvanizing constituencies, reinforcing support and sustaining the efforts required to build inclusive conversations and dialogue.

“For UNESCO, peace is achieved not only through economic and political actions, but also on an intellectual level. New forms of dialogue are required and therefore the years 2013-2022 are declared the International Decade of Rapprochement of Cultures,” Irina Bokova (pictured above), Secretary General of UNESCO
CIVIL SOCIETY’S VOICE MUST BE HEARD WHEN PROMOTING INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

The Global Dialogue Foundation (GDF) together with the UN Alliance of Civilizations, the Government of Azerbaijan and Civil Society champions from Australia, Austria, Azerbaijan, India, Macedonia, Nigeria, Romania met for a consultative meeting with the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, H.E. Nassir Abdulazzi Al-Nasser to discuss the creation of Civil Society Country Chapters for the Alliance of Civilizations. The presenting NGO’s were SAGE Foundation, Scheherazade Foundation, Great Silk Way International Youth Union, Youth Organization Shpresa, International Leadership Institute, Nigeria Network of NGO’s and Cultural Infusion.

The desired outcome is to build local strategies to strengthen civil society participation in the discussions and dialogue about cultural diversity and inclusion. Successful change cannot be sustained without the input of local people.
THE TIME FOR TALK IS OVER.
TACTICS AND ACTION PLANS CRITICAL

PARTICIPANTS WANT TO SEE A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK, A SHORT LIST OF TACTICS AND ACTIONS THAT ARE MEASURABLE AND UNIVERSALLY ADOPTED

The time for talk is over. Focused actions are needed to move the dial on the effort (talks, political action, and specific actions to change the cultural paradigms). Participants expressed a desire to not see forums become events and opportunities to meet and greet people, but milestones to calibrate the change effort needed. Key questions that rose:

- How do you move from talk and theatrics to an on the ground action plan? How do you show success in a way that empowers and builds the movement?

- How do you enhance the engagement and support of key actors with financial commitment? How do you define the challenge in a way young people can sign on?

- History and Legacy Challenges - How do you get societies to trust you when they have been faced with centuries of abuse, slavery, genocide and marginalization? How do you move beyond fear and mistrust?

- Beyond Tolerance - How do you convince civil society of the value of multicultural societies, and ways to enhance and value diversity?

- How do you mitigate the influence and impact of the "radical fringe" who are the fundamentalists, extremists, and "regressionists" who don't see the benefit or value of multiculturalism, and indeed see it as a threat to fear?

- How do you balance the strategic and longer term goals with the practice short term tactics that move the needle (framework, priorities, process for improvement and adaptation, tactic, metrics)?

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THE IMPORTANCE OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

Experience to date with the Millennium Development Goals has shown that, in many cases, sustained progress towards the MDGs has been underpinned by good governance and women's empowerment, and hampered by their absence.

From: UN SYSTEM TASK TEAM ON THE POST 2015 AGENDA (Governance and development)
THE CULTURAL TOURS AND VISITS WERE EXTREMELY HELPFUL IN UNDERSTANDING LOCAL TRADITIONS AND CONTEXT

IT IS IMPORTANT TO IMMERSE ONE’S SELF IN THE LOCAL CULTURE OF THE HOST COUNTRY.

*Cultural competency* is extremely important. One needs to immerse oneself in the local culture. In doing so one is better prepared to understand some of the cultural nuances that impact the change process at the grassroots level. Visiting and touring other cultures is a very effective way to uphold and expand learning on cultural diversity.

In Azerbaijan, the visits and tours were extremely important in understanding the historical context for diversity and inclusion. It provided an important marker of culture, tradition, and identity.

As individuals and leaders, we must develop the capacity to live in both worlds. In so doing we help in developing the building blocks of peace.

The diversity and inclusion paradox is extremely complex. Simple “cookie; cutter” approaches are neither sustainable nor effective.

Strategies and tactics must be adapted to the local context (historical, cultural, political, and civic) to be operational.
SUSTAINABLE PROGRESS MUST BE BASED ON A WELL THOUGHT OUT CHANGE AGENDA

THE CONVERSATION AND DIALOGUE MUST BE FRAMED IN A STRATEGIC CONTEXT. IT MUST INCLUDE AN UNDERSTANDING OF ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PRINCIPLES AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS

What is the “global case” for diversity, inclusion, and cultural dialogue? What are the strategic diversity and inclusion implications that should be considered and how are they integrated into strategies such as:

- Peace
- Economic development
- Sustainability
- Healthy families and communities
- Social justice and human rights
- Education
- Innovation and Creativity

TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE – INSIGHTS FROM THE CORPORATE SECTOR

The transformational change must include a well developed framework which is based on commitments and backed by a limited set of goals, targets and indicators.

Some key elements that should be considered include the following:

- The change process must be led by Top Global leaders (Government, NGOs, Religious, Private Sector)
- The Framework for Change (strategic imperative and business case)
- The Strategic Priorities (limited set of overarching goals)

[The transformational change that is needed for sustainable development requires a well-designed accountability framework to turn promises into effective commitments and should be backed by a limited number of goals, targets and indicators.]

Throughout the past decade, statistics, indicators and data on the cultural sector, as well as operational activities have underscored that culture can be a powerful driver for development, with community-wide social, economic and environmental impacts.

From: UN SYSTEM TASK TEAM ON THE POST 2015 AGENDA
- The champions (actors who will help to drive and sustain the change process) must be identified and developed.
- A process for translating the strategic priorities into a short list of tactics with measurable outcomes
- A short list of principles that guides the process
- Clear understanding of the key stakeholders (who should be at the table) - roles, responsibilities, relationships
- Appropriate assessment and due diligence on complimentary efforts. The goal is to seek alignment, partnership and collaboration and to minimize duplicative efforts.

KEY PARTNERS SHOULD INCLUDE:

- UNESCO
- Alliance of Civilizations
- Strategic Change Agents (private industry, NGOs, Government leaders)

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Learn from multi-stakeholder partnerships
Engage new and emerging partners (especially women and youth)
Strengthen global partnerships
Focus on a short list of key outcomes, indicators and metrics to assess progress
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Effenus Henderson is Chief Diversity Officer for Weyerhaeuser Company, Federal Way, Washington where he advises the CEO and senior management team on diversity, inclusion and affirmative action related matters. He is an internationally recognized diversity thought leader and has been invited by numerous companies and organizations to share his expertise. He has provided advisory and consultative support on diversity and inclusion to the Federal Government's Environmental Protection Agency, USDA, NIH, US Forest Service and Office of Personnel Management.

He has addressed members of the General Assembly of the United Nations on intercultural and interreligious diversity, and also addressed a high level panel of the Alliance of Civilizations in Madrid, Spain in 2008, Istanbul Turkey in 2009, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in 2010 and Doha, Qatar in 2011. He also participated in a high level dialogue sponsored by the High Commissioner on Human Rights in preparation for the 60th Anniversary Celebration of the Universal Declaration of human rights in Paris, France. In May of 2011, he was named by Black Enterprise Magazine as one of the “Top Executives in Diversity” for his outstanding business achievements.

In 2012 he was appointed by EPA Administrator, Lisa Jackson, to the National Environmental Justice Advisory Board. He chairs the Washington state Environmental Education Association.

He is currently serving as co-chair of the Society of Human Resource Management’s Diversity and Inclusion Standards Taskforce which is leading to national diversity standards, approved by ANSI, in the areas of chief diversity officer competencies, diversity programs, and diversity metrics. The taskforce is also working with the International Standards Organization (ISO) on extending the standards globally.

Effenus Henderson

Effenus.henderson@gmail.com