



THE SIXTH ASEM INTERFAITH DIALOGUE MADRID, 7TH -9TH APRIL 2010

CONCEPT PAPER

BACKGROUND

Since the inception of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue back in 2005, successive editions have provided a framework in which Government representatives, policy makers, scholars and religious leaders have exchanged views on religious, social and cultural issues in the spirit of respect, mutual tolerance and understanding.

The role of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue in the promotion of greater mutual understanding between Asia and Europe cannot be underestimated. As stated in the ASEM Summit in 2008, “Leaders have resolved to take concerted action to further promote interfaith understanding and exchanges, taking global leadership in working towards building a world where different cultures and civilizations co-exist in harmony, equality and mutual respect”. At the same time, leaders have emphasized the importance of keeping the good momentum of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogue and welcomed the outcomes of the ASEM Interfaith Dialogues (Nanjing 2007 and Amsterdam 2008, Seoul 2009) urging governments to actively facilitate interfaith and intercultural dialogues.

As pointed out in the Ninth ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting Chair’s Statement Ha Noi, 25–26 May 2009, within the ASEM framework there has been a number of interfaith dialogues that advocated respect for values universal to all civilizations such as solidarity, tolerance, recognition of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all.

In this spirit, and building on the successful outcome of previous editions, the 6th ASEM Interfaith Dialogue aims at reducing the tensions and misunderstandings exacerbated by several factors underlined at the 5th ASEM Interfaith Dialogue held in Seoul, namely, the international economic and financial crisis, and its subsequent implications on employment and the international financial architecture, development and food for all. As asserted in the Seoul Statement on ASEM Interfaith Dialogue, the present challenges are

multidimensional and global in nature. To promote social cohesion, interfaith dialogue can be used to acknowledge different views and approaches. Commonalities amongst faiths could be identified via interfaith dialogue and would serve as a basis for seeking solutions. It is acknowledged that consideration of the ideas of different faiths by governments and secular institutions may help in creating harmonious and stable economic systems.

The deliberations of the 6th ASEM Interfaith will be focused on three major themes to be discussed in three working groups:

1. - RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Religious freedom and free expression are two sides of the same coin. Bigger efforts should be made to delve into the knowledge and implementation of the Universal declaration of Human Rights. Attitudes or actions showing disrespect for religious freedom should be known and identified in order to avoid them and correct the damage they cause.

It's essential to ensure these freedoms are well protected. The dignity of a person demands respect for his or her faith, for his or her right not to profess it or to change it. Free speech should be exerted in a responsible way.

2. - RESPECT AND MUTUAL KNOWLEDGE

The lack of information about other societies and ideas and the lack of knowledge result in distrust and suspicion. As a consequence thereof, unfair situations arise in the fields of education, employment, housing or violence in the most extreme cases. The lack of knowledge is reciprocal; we do not know those who do not know us.

The positive role of religion in secular societies is acknowledged and respected.

Improving education and working on the political and cultural aspects of any society is a must. The actions and attitudes conducive to gender discrimination should be identified and known to understand they should disappear.

3. - INTERFAITH AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUES AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN SOCIETIES

The Alliance of Civilizations is a prominent initiative in this field. As stated in the Ninth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting Chair's Statement Ha Noi, 25–26 May 2009, since the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations (2001), there has been a common understanding among nations that globalization encompassed economic, financial and technological aspects, human, cultural, spiritual dimensions, the interdependence of humankind and its rich diversity. The dialogue among cultures and civilizations is therefore necessary and any dialogue of this nature should be conducted in a spirit of sincerity, respect and mutual understanding.

Religious and intercultural dialogue is present as an item in the General Assembly since 2007, subsequent to Resolution 61/221 dated 20-12-2006. In this regard, 2010 has been designated as the Year of Rapprochement among cultures.