

The United Nations and Dialogue among Civilizations

Prof. ZHANG Guihong

Executive Director, Center for UN Studies at Fudan University

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As the most universal, representative and authoritative inter-governmental international organization, the United Nations is not only the best place to practice multilateralism, the effective platform to collectively response to various threats and challenges, but also an advocator, organizer, participant and promoter of dialogue among civilizations.

I. from dialogue of civilizations to alliance of civilizations: the role of the United Nations

After the end of cold war, the international relations have undergone profound change. The clash of civilizations, according to some scholars, will replace the conflicts among nation-states and become the new paradigm of international politics. It is highly demanded to strengthen the dialogue and mutual understanding between different cultures and to promote the value of tolerance, equality, and diversity in order to address the tension and conflict. The United Nations, as the representative and forum of the diversity of civilizations, plays an irreplaceable role in promoting dialogue among different civilizations.

On November 4, 1998, the 53rd Session of the UN General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution (A/RES/53/22), declared 2001 as “the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations.” The resolution recognized the cultural diversity and the diversity of human creativity, emphasized the importance of dialogue as a means

to achieve understanding, eliminate the threat to peace, and strengthen mutual contact, as well as a means to strengthen the exchanges between different civilizations. Both the 54th and 55th sessions of the UN General Assembly included “the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations” in the provisional agenda of the General Assembly (A/RES/54/113, A/RES/55/23). In November 2001, the 56th session of the UN General Assembly was held after “9.11” terrorist attacks. The Secretary-General Kofi Annan released the report on “Dialogue among Civilizations”, pointing out that cultural and religious diversity is a source of strength, rather than the cause of division and confrontation. In 2002, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution, announcing May 21 as “World Day for Cultural Diversity for Dialogue and Development”.

The Alliance of Civilizations (AOC) initiative was originally proposed in the 59th session of the UN General Assembly in 2004 by former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero and co-sponsored with the former Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. In July 2005, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan announced the establishment of the Alliance of Civilizations and appointed a High Level Group to guide the activities of the AOC. In April 2007, Ban Ki-moon who just took over as the UN Secretary-General appointed Jorge Sampaio, former President of Portugal as High Representative of the AOC.

The establishment of the AOC indicates the new development of the dialogue among civilizations. From 10 years of dialogue among civilizations, especially the development of the AOC, we can find that the United Nations plays a vital role in the dialogue among civilizations:

First, The United Nations General Assembly is the initiator of the dialogue among civilizations. It is the General Assembly and its resolutions that make dialogue among civilizations become the consensus of the international community. As a forum expressing opinions and positions, a stage of multilateral diplomacy and a platform for international cooperation, the General Assembly is able to authorize and legalize the initiatives by member states or NGOs by turning them into global agenda.

Second, the United Nations Secretary-General is an active promoter of dialogue

among civilizations. The UN Secretary-General appoints High Representative and Ambassadors for the dialogue among civilizations, establishes the High Level Group and a trust fund, attends various meetings and activities of dialogue among civilization organized by the member states and regional/international organizations.

Third, UNAOC is the organizer of the dialogue among civilizations. Based on the recommendations of the High Level Group, the main projects and activities of AOC relate to youth, education, media and immigration.

II. Dialogue among civilizations is the function and mission of the United Nations

In the new century, the United Nations may not have big change in terms of its universality, representativeness and authority, and remain unique and irreplaceable on the one hand, but the United Nations faces with a lot of challenges on the other hand. How to play a more important role in the new global governance structure is a new task for the United Nations. The dialogue among civilizations can be an important approach for the United Nations to maintain peace, achieve development, and promote human rights.

Through the dialogue to achieve mutual understanding. The primary function of the dialogue among civilizations is to reach a mutual understanding. It is dialogue that helps understand each other's interests, needs, ideas and thoughts, which will make it possible to communicate, exchange, consult and negotiate, and based on which to finally seek commonness among difference and reach mutual understanding and trust.

Through the understanding to promote cooperation. Mutual understanding and trust is the key for cooperation. The difference of ideology, social system and development model should not become obstacles for cooperation, or even the excuses for mutual confrontation. The diversity and difference of the world civilization and culture should not be a source of conflict but the momentum of exchanges and cooperation. Only with the trust based on the deep understanding, can this cooperation be durable and effective.

Through the cooperation to achieve peace and development. In the time of economic globalization and cultural diversity, the dialogue among civilization is an effective way and best choice to solve conflicts between states, nations, races, religions and civilizations.

III. In the dialogue among civilizations of the United Nations, China has a great potential to contribute

In the dialogue among civilizations, China has unique conditions and advantages, and thus great potential to contribute:

First, China has always supported the central role of the United Nations in international affairs and multilateral diplomacy, and also actively participated in the United Nations-led dialogue among civilizations.

Second, dialogue among civilizations is very much in accordance with China's future development strategy.

Third, Confucianism as an important representative of the Chinese culture is an important force in the dialogue among civilizations.

Fourth, the Nishan Forum is a platform of dialogue among civilizations with China as the host.

Fifth, the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations is turning part of its focus to Asia-Pacific region, which will give a good opportunity to China.

It is foreseeable that the Confucian culture as the main body of the oriental civilization will occupy an important position in the United Nations dialogue among civilizations, and China will undoubtedly make new contributions to the dialogue among civilizations.

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