

Paris-Nishan Forum

"Confucianism and New Humanism in a Globalized World"

Held at UNESCO Headquarters on 16 April 2012

Summary of the interventions

OPENING

In her address, the Director-General of UNESCO, **Irina BOKOVA**, stressed the importance of the borderless dialogue established by the Paris-Nishan Forum to invent a new humanism tailored to the requirements of a globalized world, which should not be about the circulation of goods, but should also give rise to an exchange of ideas and a cross-fertilization of cultures. At a time when aspirations to human dignity, civic participation and sustainable development were growing stronger while the world was faced with economic and environmental crises, a new humanism should draw lessons from Confucius and Asian philosophies to build a harmony amongst the diversity of peoples as well as between them and nature. The new humanism must contribute to harmonious relations between all regions in a world where all societies are connected. It is a basis on which to rethink the scope of public policy and the role of international organizations.

Jean-Pierre RAFFARIN, former Prime Minister of France, affirmed that humanism was in permanent debate with itself since it consisted in a dynamic relation between the quest for the universal and the respect of cultural diversity. Humanism was a conception of the human condition whereby humanity was defined by spiritual, not material, traits. European-born humanism had much to learn from China. The positive tension between the yin and the yang was, for instance, a call for every individual and every nation to seek harmony as temperance in the face of complexity. Today, Confucius still had a lesson to teach on how to see people in their complexity while avoiding stereotypes. A new humanism should revolve around such values as respect for human dignity, reciprocity or harmony, and a capacity to envision something higher than ourselves. In that spirit, a new humanism was a message of hope for youth.

Remarking that Buddhism, having come to China from India, was a symbol of intercultural friendship and exchange, Professor **XU Jialu**, founder of the Nishan Forum and former Vice Chairman of the Standing Committee of National People's Congress, stressed the importance of morality in a complex world. As the current global crises had been caused by humanity, there was a need for a harmonious coexistence between people or harmony in diversity. Material and technological progress had, left to itself, generated turbulences as well as indifference to human misery and neglect of the past and moral values. Science and technology could not solve the problems they had generated: this was possible only through wisdom. Humanity had to prove itself creative to warrant itself a safe future.

The Executive Director of the Confucius Institute Headquarters and co-founder of the Nishan Forum, **XU Lin**, expressed her view that the hundreds of thousands of people

trained worldwide in Chinese language and civilization by the Confucius Institute were a living demonstration that what brought civilizations closer carried more weight than what separated them. In its ambition to contribute to global civilization, China had recognized that development had to be an undertaking both economic and cultural.

HARMONY THROUGH DIVERSITY AND THE EXIGENCIES OF A GLOBALIZING WORLD

To **Michel CAMDESSUS**, Honorary Governor of the Banque de France and former Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund, the present crisis was not temporary; it was not another crisis in the course of globalization, it was a crisis of globalization. Bearing on poverty, climate, energy, finance, culture or governance, all the crises were interconnected and had to be faced abreast. Individualism and the quest for profit had dislocated traditional value systems. A new ethical approach, a new humanism was needed, that would rest on three principles: friendship, diversity and multilateralism. Beyond political and economic arrangements, a number of attitudes and values had to be promoted: dialogue as an obligation; identifying the universal seeds of humanism in all cultures; precaution; solidarity; and frugality.

Recalling that Confucius held harmony as the goal of governance and that modern science was a spawn of the original, Mediterranean-born, humanism, **Jean-Patrick CONNERADE**, President of the European Academy of Sciences, Arts and Literature, insisted that, for humanism to be a plank towards harmony, Westerners had to acknowledge the diversity of their intellectual origins, which were both in the West and in the East as well as in the Arab world. Scientific humanism should be an important dimension of the new humanism since science had a capacity to bring cultures closer together, as had been seen during the Cold War. In his view, nationalism should not impinge on the discussions on culture.

Imre HAMAR, Director of the Confucius Institute at the Eötvös Lóránd University, Hungary, characterized diversity as the fact that different cultures provided different answers to identical problems. Today, in the current situation of the world, there was a need for dialogue because globalization had started as a colonizing process with no mutual understanding at its basis. The Confucius Institute had the important mission of spreading the culture of China and, in the process, transmitting a set of deeply human values. Soft power was indispensable to disseminate such values as benevolence between neighbours.

Harmony is an imperative objective in a fast, globalizing and diversifying world, affirmed **ZHOU Hong**, Director of the Institute of European Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). As the trend towards a unification of the globe could be deemed inevitable, three choices had to be made: individual efforts to promote harmony; bridging traditions and globalization; and look for unity in diversity. In a diversified world, where different histories and cultures coexisted, culture and science should be harnessed as channels to foster rapprochement and mutual understanding. She concluded that the future citizens of the world ought to have a culture both Western and Eastern in its making.

HARMONY THROUGH DIFFERENCE AND THE DIALOGUE AMONG CULTURES

In the view of **Jacques ATTALI**, Professor and President of Planet Finance, China was about to participate in the dialogue of civilizations for the first time in its history, which raised questions as to the future of globalization, so far the result of Western expansionism: would a culture dominate the other or would we have a syncretic civilization? Would the world adopt a Confucian statism or a Western individualism, the latter understood as a desire to vote, express oneself or consume? Paradoxically, while the West was giving way on the economic and artistic scenes, the current success of this value signalled a deep westernization of the world. Individualism led to a risk of atomizing societies, though, because of its neglect for the past, the environment or the future (as was obvious in the debt crises). To reconcile peoples between themselves and with nature, spiritual solutions had to be promoted, such as knowledge of oneself and the others – creating new forms of empathy.

Describing her work, **Sabiha AL-KHEMIR**, a writer, art consultant, and artist as well as the Founding Director of the Museum of Islamic Art, Doha, Qatar, pleaded against the fear of the other. Humanity should set itself to design a bank of cultural wisdom, where every wisdom would be deposited so as to be shared universally. As a fervent promoter of intercultural dialogue, she elaborated on the multiple implications behind a project she had just achieved, an exhibition travelling throughout the United States with the support of a Mormon university, "Beauty and Belief - Crossing Bridges with the Arts of Islamic Culture." This project showed that creativity could bring different cultural and religious community closer because, in her mind, discussions about beauty and goodness in different cultures fostered mutual understanding and helped create unity in diversity.

One main difficulty of our times laid, according to **Ward GRAHAM**, Professor of Contextual Theology and Ethics at the University of Manchester, United Kingdom, in the building of a common ethical space. While universal, the human rights framework, he noted, had emerged in the very specific context of the 18th century European Enlightenment. The main idea behind the human rights was based on self-property – an idea not without difficulties since it assumed that individuals could be conceived as properties and could be thought as being independent from others and nature. There was a need to explore new manners of apprehending individuality and identity, with a view to better respect people, life and the natural environment in general.

Looking for ways to adapt the Confucius' philosophy to the modern world, **TONG Shijun**, Professor of philosophy and Chair of the Academic Committee of East China Normal University and former Vice-President of Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), focused on the means to achieve consensus in today's world, despite the current lack of consensus both in international and domestic politics. His main point was that people could reach consensus in quite different ways, since different types of solutions could be brought to problems and obstacles raised in local, national or international contexts. Noting that in international negotiations, the point was to make effort towards rather than simply reach agreements, he concluded that pluralistic societies could withstand internal disagreements as long as people agreed to dialogue and follow the rules thereof.

Heralding such values as dialogue and ubuntu, **Katalin BOGYAY**, President of the 36th General Conference of UNESCO and Ambassador Permanent Delegate of Hungary to UNESCO, affirmed that in a world where peace was still not a normal state of affairs, reflection was needed on how to ensure a harmonious future when globalization broke down inter-cultural barriers and brought the diverse social, religious and ethnic groups in

close contact with each other. To combat injustice, xenophobia and inequality, harmony had to be promoted domestically, through social inclusion, as well as internationally, through an ethically responsible global governance. Harmony was not monotony, but plurality and diversity. It was not compatible with dictatorship. Education was crucial to transmit the values of pluralism and dignity. People should be taught in their traditions, respecting their language and history, so as to create a sense of self-confidence.

Reflecting on the situation of her home country, Mali, **Aminata TRAORE**, President of the “Forum pour un autre Mali” and former Minister for Culture and Tourism of Mali, affirmed that we lived in a world where peoples had become disposable. In three months, Mali had lost two-thirds of its territory to Tuareg and Islamist armed movements – an aggravation of its existing economic and food crisis situations, this amputation had been caused by the injustice, inequality and violence inherent to liberal globalization, whereby African peoples were deemed inferior and unworthy of the riches of Africa, which had become a battleground between the West and China. Too few people denounced the violence exerted by free-market capitalism against populations, women, and African statehood. Africa had a humanism of its own to offer to the world, a humanism teaching spiritual values of solidarity and dignity.

Professor **CAO Weidong**, Professor at the School of Chinese Language and Literature and Deputy Director of the Institute for Advanced Study of the Humanities and Religion (IASHR), Beijing Normal University, view the tensions between science and religion within European Humanism as an expression of conflicts within post-Medieval society. Thus, a new modernization program had to correspond to the current challenges in the process of globalization. This should happen through a dialogue whereby European Humanism would take Chinese or Oriental humanist traditions as a mirror while Chinese Humanist traditions would interact with Western Humanism. Such an intercultural dialogue had the potential to promote diversity while bridging knowledge and belief as universal features of the human mind.

In a reference to Aminata Traoré's presentation, Professor **XU Jialu** remarked that the theme of the conference was not exclusively academic. Scientists and scholars had a duty to call out to their leaders and their nations, drawing their attention to unjust and inhumane situations. His view was that Confucianism should contribute to the development of a global ethics. Throughout history, the dialogue between the Western and Chinese traditions had been at best fragmentary and needed to be really engaged. Confucius recommended to political leaders that they promote peace and prosperity by fostering rites, or rules that guide individuals rather than hamper them. Provided room was made for creativity and innovation, the Confucianist values of rite and goodness could be tailored to the requirements of our time so as to offer a spiritual basis to face future challenges with peace and non-violence as a common objective of humanity.

CONCLUSION OF THE FORUM

The very existence of the Paris-Nishan Forum at UNESCO attested that the world was on the right track, said **WU Jianmin**, Vice Chairman of Organizing Committee of the China's Nishan Forum and Vice-President of the European Academy of Sciences, Arts and Literature. He noted that both the West and the East had progressed thanks to their mutual exchanges at key moments in their respective histories. In a world confronted to new realities, a new humanism was needed, that would draw on all traditions of thought.

Humanity stood at a crossroads, between the drive for conflict and tensions and the drive for peace and cooperation. While the former rested on a win-lose approach, the latter sought win-win solutions – the new humanism being one of those. China could contribute its tradition of valuing harmony in diversity and points of convergence as well as a vision where humanity and nature formed a whole.

In his concluding remarks, **Hans D'ORVILLE**, Assistant Director-General of UNESCO for Strategic Planning, stressed that the new humanism was a global ethics for the 21st century. As such, it could not be solely European. It had to draw from all traditions in the Orient, in Africa and in Latin America and the Caribbean. In that undertaking, it was essential to bear in mind that dialogue was not a zero-sum game but an exercise in mutual respect and creativity, taking advantage of diversity. Youth had to be at the centre of the debates on the new humanism because they embodied the future we had to build collectively.