

“International Day of Dialogue between Civilizations: June 10”

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Origin

On November 4, 1998, the United Nations General Assembly decided to declare 2001 the International Year of Dialogue Among Cultures.

During his visit to Weimar on July 12, 2000, Iranian Prime Minister Mohammad Khatami called for dialogue between the East and the West and “above all, the search for compassionate and trusting contact.”

On Friday, June 7, 2024, the 78th session of the United Nations General Assembly unanimously adopted a resolution proposed by China to establish the International Day of Dialogue among Civilizations.

The UN resolution calls for respect for the diversity of civilizations and emphasizes the “crucial role of dialogue” between civilizations in maintaining world peace, promoting common development, improving human well-being, and achieving collective progress.

The goals of dialogue as seen by China

China proposes to establish an International Day of Dialogue among Civilizations

- to give full play to the significance of dialogue among civilizations in “eliminating discrimination and prejudice,
- expanding understanding and trust,
- promoting people-to-people exchanges,
- and strengthening solidarity and cooperation.”

The advantages of dialogue

Advantages and strengths of a civilization:

What others can potentially learn from this civilization.

Weaknesses and shortcomings of a civilization:

What can be learned from other civilizations.

Problem:

Weaknesses and shortcomings of one's own civilization are often overlooked or ignored.

Through dialogue, these weaknesses and shortcomings can be revealed by other civilizations.

The strengths of non-western civilizations

Family and relatives form a social network:

Strong sense of belonging and responsibility within the family (few divorces) and among relatives.

Strong connection to the state.

Sense of unity with all living beings.

Meditation and a culture of self-awareness for all.

The disadvantages of non-western civilizations

- Dependence on family and relatives.
- Wives must submit to their husbands.
- Hierarchy and subordination shape personal and social life!
- Children are often seen as the property of their parents.
- Culture of obedience!
- Conflict, criticism, differences, and diversity are viewed negatively!
- Sexual diversity is not accepted and is punished.
- Democracy is viewed negatively because it involves conflict, criticism, and diversity.
- The rights of the individual are disregarded.
- Power is not controlled, which leads to abuse of power and corruption.

The strengths of western civilizations

- Social network through society: relief for families and relatives.
- Equality between men and women.
- The development of human dignity is possible.
- Compromises are necessary.
- Conflict, criticism, differences, and diversity are necessary and natural.
- Sexual diversity is accepted.
- Democracy becomes possible.
- Rationality in technology and economics leads to capitalism, but also to very effective forms of economic activity.
- The scientific worldview in conjunction with capitalism brings about enormous advances in knowledge and extreme development of the economy and prosperity.
- Advances in medicine, care for the disabled and the elderly.
- Many non-governmental organizations (NGOs, strong civil society).
- Protection of individual privacy.
- Separation of powers: Control of those in power (against corruption).
- Freedom of the press, free journalism.
- Authorities are elected for a limited term! Power is limited in time!

The disadvantages of western civilizations

- Individualism causes loneliness.
- Ruthlessness and indifference towards family members and relatives is on the rise.
- People are being torn out of the context of creation: Individual happiness and self-realization are becoming the essential goals and meanings of life: deficits of the churches!
- The performance-oriented thinking of western economic systems leads to
 - many diseases,
 - the destruction of the environment,
 - the exploitation of weaker peoples and cultures,
 - and the exploitation of the animal world (factory farming).
- The application of Charles Darwin's findings (evolution) to humans and peoples led to social Darwinism and racial fanaticism, which claimed millions of victims in National Socialism as “inferior races” and “unworthy of life.”
- Religion is seen as unscientific and is supposed to serve only to provide peace of mind and offer beautiful events.

Dialogue, democracy, and male-female relationships

- The shift from a top-down structure toward equality.
- Instead of obedience and subordination: relationships based on trust and appreciation.
- The necessity of frequent and open communication.
- Two essential phrases:
“I love you!”
“I respect you for being different!”
- The children's experience: Dad is unique and Mom is unique - and they are both different, but they still form a unit.
- Respect for diversity is also very important for a democracy!

Modern developments create new forms of top-down structures

AI

Social media

Bureaucracy

Surveillance systems

The EU is trying to maintain the protection of individuals even in the face of new developments.

Dialogue und Democracy in the Catholic Church

- Jesus was all about compassion and helpfulness, regardless of religion or ethnicity.
- For Jesus, all people were “Children of God”: equal dignity and value: overcoming the top-down mindset.
- The Catholic Church introduced a new class structure through the clergy, and with it a top-down mindset.
- Authorities cannot be elected or voted out of office and are not subject to control.
- There is no separation of powers.
- “Democracy” is demanded by society but rejected within the Church: Reason:
Truth cannot be decided by majority vote!??
- Many bishops are obviously unfamiliar with the principles of modern democracy:
Human dignity and fundamental rights cannot be decided by majority vote either!

Feelings of inferiority and the call for a “strong man”

Non-Western civilizations are often characterized by strong feelings of inferiority:

China: humiliation through colonialism and war with Japan.

Iran: humiliation through economic isolation.

Russia: The cruelty of Stalin and the National Socialists;
Reduction of the territory after 1990

Many Asian and African peoples were humiliated through colonialism and “slave hunts.”

Meanwhile, some western peoples also have strong feelings of inferiority and therefore tend toward authoritarian governments:

USA:

Many people no longer had a place in their homeland.

Humiliation through the Vietnam War and the Afghanistan War.

Hungary:

Humiliation of a proud and powerful people through the loss of World War I and the subsequent reduction of the country's territory by the western powers.

The role of religions (1)

With 1.4 billion members, the Catholic Church is the largest religious community in the world and is present in both Western and non-Western civilizations.

The Catholic Church could therefore uncover the strengths and weaknesses of Western and non-Western civilizations and realize their respective strengths in its own structures and ways of life:

- Practicing meditation and self-awareness for all.
- Formulate a theology of creation and history to prevent dehumanizing substitute ideologies.
- Formulate a doctrine of faith on the “meaning of life” in order to prevent capitalism and its negative effects.
- Formulate a doctrine of faith on the psychological growth processes in marriage and family.
- ...

Through dialogue with other religions, the Catholic Church could encourage them to build bridges between civilizations.

The role of religions (2)

Role model for respect for diversity and difference.

Role model for power control and separation of powers.

Role model for overcoming top-down thinking.

Role model for conflict management, for disputes and criticism.

Role model for the equality of men and women.

Contemporary doctrine on human dignity and fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Contemporary doctrine on compassion, helpfulness, and self-love.

Contemporary doctrine on a modern worldview.

Contemporary doctrine on aggression and contempt for humanity.

A contemporary culture of prayer, liturgy, and spirituality.