

FINAL REPORT

SYMPOSIUM ON THE CULTURE OF PEACE IN SOMALIA

1. A symposium on the Culture of Peace in Somalia was held in Sana'a, Yemen from 17-20 April 1995. 67 Somali intellectuals coming from Somalia and from other countries were joined by representatives from UNESCO and other international organizations in the presence of the media for the discussion of "the culture of peace in Somalia for the reconciliation of Somalia with itself".
2. Reflecting the great importance given by the international community to the establishment of a culture of peace in Somalia, the symposium was opened by addresses by the Prime Minister of Yemen, the personal representative of the Director-General of UNESCO, the President of the General Conference of UNESCO, the Minister of Education of Yemen who serves as the President of the Yemeni National Commission for UNESCO, the Secretary-General of that Commission, and representatives of the Arab League, the European Community, and the Islamic Conference organization.
3. The opening ceremony included songs by a poet and ensemble of singers, who testified to the deep oral traditions of Somali society and the longing for peace of its people.
4. Mr. Ahmed Sayyad, who is President of the UNESCO General Conference, chaired the symposium. He urged the gathering of intellectuals to set aside clan or partisan loyalties and work together as individuals in a common task for a Somalia which belongs to everyone living there with no one person more national than another. He asked them not to look backwards or to seek blame for the past, but to direct their vision to the future, to maintain peace and develop a peace culture.
5. The UNESCO Culture of Peace Programme was presented in terms of its long-term national programmes of reconciliation and peace-building in El Salvador and Mozambique and its recent national forums to launch a culture of peace process in the Congo, Burundi, and Sudan. These programmes are based on the participation by all sides of a conflict in the planning and implementation of human development projects.
6. UNESCO's Programme of Education and Emergency Reconstruction was also described. This includes textbook production and distribution, teacher training and dissemination of teacher educational packages throughout Somalia. This programme includes a culture of peace content as well as basic educational skills.
7. The debate was divided into sessions devoted to three themes: 1) Rebuild the Somali society; 2) Rehabilitate the Somali state; and 3) Reintegrate Somalia in its international environment.
8. Although the objective of the symposium was to chart a course toward a future culture of peace in Somalia, most speakers felt it necessary to begin by assessing the

tragic difficulties of the current situation and to try to understand the causes.

9. Indeed the great suffering of the Somali people in recent years must be acknowledged as the starting point for any debate. No region of the country was spared from the destruction of drought and warfare. Figures of 250,000 to 500,000 deaths have been given, and that does not mention the destruction of families, the physical and psychological wounds, the hundreds of thousands of uprooted and displaced people and refugees.

10. The insecurity of these years has compelled the people, coming from nomadic roots, to identify with clans and subclans. Their deep traditional mechanisms of peaceful conflict resolution have been superseded by a culture of war.

11. Where can one begin to rebuild Somali society as a culture of peace? One elder, reciting a poem, put his finger on the first step to be taken: a national culture of peace must be based upon individual and family peace, a commitment to fight for peace, defend it, refuse violence and give the priority to dialogue and understanding. A culture of peace must start from the bottom upwards. And the entire process must be given time. It must not be rushed.

12. Although most speakers indicated the need for continued international support, they were united in the conviction that the fate of Somalia is in the hands of the Somali people. The key actors of the process must be the Somalis themselves.

13. Many speakers emphasized that disarmament, demobilization and a commitment to non-violence must precede the creation of a culture of peace and democracy. An atmosphere of non-violence and security is the prerequisite of any other progress.

14. Education was a theme woven throughout. Formal and non-formal education, basic and vocational training were all judged to be essential. Training in basic skills needs to be accompanied by programmes that present positive images of values of peace such as traditional conciliation mechanisms and universal values of human rights and tolerance. Education should respect the age-old values of Somali religion and culture. Its content should come from real-life experience and should not be imposed from outside.

1. A culture of peace should be based on tolerance and understanding. Somali culture has a richness of diversity and tradition. Rather than conflict there can be a dialogue among all of the regions. Some questioned if there cannot be a "positive tribalism" to replace the violent tribal conflicts that have dominated in recent years.

15. The media play a crucial role. Instead of focusing on violence, they should disseminate the traditional and universal values of tolerance and dialogue, including artistic programmes which promote the values of a culture of peace. In addition to radio programmes and printed materials, suggestions were made for artistic caravans to disseminate peace throughout all areas of the country.

16. Because women promote peace culture through the family and community, they need to be assisted with their complicated daily-life requirements through programmes in functional literacy, health care, home economics and family planning. Women should be empowered to take roles of responsibility in every level of the peace and democratic process. It was said that if you educate a man you educate one person, but if you educate a woman you educate an entire family.

17. Women have a special power to promote peace among men. It was told that a young woman, wanting to test her suitor, asked him two questions: "What is the best mat on which a man could sleep soundly?" The answer was, "Peace". The second question was "What is the greatest shield to protect camels from the plunder of looters?" The answer was again, "Peace." After which, she was satisfied with the intelligence of her suitor. It was said by the women that men will be perceived as cowards if they continue making war, but as heroes if they embark upon and succeed in making peace.

18. Youth have been caught up in a culture of war and learned to live by the gun. In order to facilitate the demobilization of clan militias and to enable them to live an ordinary life, it is necessary to develop programmes of training and income-generating employment for all youth.

19. The elders have a key role to play in the reconciliation and rebuilding of Somali society, and especially in developing a culture of peace. Traditionally it has been the elders who have been the guardians of traditional values and who have been responsible to resolve conflicts and work out problems in conjunction with the elders from neighboring villages and clans.

20. The various professional sectors of the society, teachers, social-workers, medical workers, university professors, farmers, cattle raisers, merchants, need to regroup into professional associations free from clan allegiance and to unite with their colleagues in other countries as a force for peace. In so doing they can lay the base for the rebuilding of a strong and democratic civil society.

21. Intellectuals, as they have demonstrated in this symposium, have a great potential and responsibility to rise above clan and political differences and to promote national unity through the reconciliation of the values of Islam and traditional pastoral democracy with new and universal values.

22. In addition to their responsibility within their own professions, intellectuals have the potential to reunite the forces of peace in the country. These forces, the elders, religious leaders, responsible politicians, businessmen, traditional pastoralists and farmers, women and youth constitute a vast majority of society. They have become isolated from each other due to the country's breakdown and partition into clan territories. The intellectuals should mobilize these various sectors of society to unite in the demand for an end to violence and the construction of peace.

23. Suggestions were made for appeals and delegations to the Somali people, as well as for appeals to the outside world for support to the Somali peace process.

24. The session devoted to the theme "to rehabilitate the Somali state" highlighted five main points of general agreement.

25. A process of reconciliation is currently taking place at the local level in villages, districts and regions, based on traditional mechanisms of conflict prevention and resolution specific to Somali society. The participants stressed the need to reinforce and extend this process. The key actors involved are the elders, the traditional and religious leaders, and women. These diverse initiatives at the grass roots level could lead to a conference of national reconciliation, involving political and religious leaders, intellectuals, elders, and peoples' movements, especially of women and youth. This conference should also engage the full force of the Somali diaspora. This would affirm the collective will of the Somalis to include everyone and mobilize all energies at the service of national reconstruction.

26. The national integrity and continuity of the Somali state was unanimously reaffirmed. Before Somalia can play its full international role, a national government must be formed with legitimacy and authority that speaks for all the people and governs the entire country.

27. The participants called for the adoption of a democratic pluralistic government after a period of transition. This would require a constitutional formula which would reconcile tradition and modernity, inspired, for example, by certain aspects of traditional Somali pastoral democracy which continue to be relevant. Emphasis was also placed on the adoption of several fundamental principles: neutrality and impartiality of the state (recruitment of government officials and security forces, for example, should be free from clan considerations); separation of powers; promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms; political pluralism; free and fair elections, etc. It was also proposed that the future fundamental law should be adopted by popular referendum. The participants also expressed their preference for a parliamentary democracy. Some opted for a two-house parliament in which the upper house would be composed of either tribes, elders, or regions in order to ensure their full representation.

28. By instituting strong regional autonomy, the way could be paved for an eventual federal state. This option was considered by a number of participants as the sole guarantee of national unity with diversity. It would limit the functions of the central government to a minimum and would require the restructuring and reinforcement of regional administration.

29. To the same end, the participants clearly indicated their preference to rehabilitate the state from the bottom to the top, thus creating a grass-roots democracy. The new political system must be built up from the village, the district and the region, through a process of free and fair elections.

30. In the session devoted to the theme of the reintegration of the Somali society into the international community, all agreed on the continued existence of the Somali state with its multiple identity as African, Arab and Islamic. This was seen as a solid basis for the reconstitution of the state unlike some other countries where there is no

common identity.

31. Many speakers addressed the importance of Somalia's regional relations, both political and economic which continue on a pragmatic basis. These include relations with its neighbours in the Horn of Africa and the Arab Peninsula. It forms a crucial link between the African and Arab worlds.

32. Several speakers deplored particular acts committed against Somali sovereignty. These include continued shipments of arms into the country, environmental destruction caused by the dumping of toxic waste, and the pillage of Somali fisheries by pirate fleets using illegal techniques.

33. It was unanimously agreed that the international community should continue to provide assistance to Somalia which corresponds to the needs identified by the Somali people and which does not interfere in its internal affairs. Assistance should be carried out always with effective communication, consultation and participation of the Somali people in all operations and with full coordination of programmes. It was pointed out that this assistance requires local or regional administrative partners which are non-partisan until such time as state partnerships become available.

34. Recommendations:

1. Demobilization. The disarmament process should be pursued with the cooperation of all concerned. All kinds of initiatives should be envisaged for the demobilization. These should include programmes of vocational training and income-generating activities parallel to demobilization with the objective of providing an alternative to a life of violence.

2. Local and regional administration. Programmes to strengthen local and regional administration which would permit them to provide public services including the ensuring of security to the population and to agencies which are providing assistance.

3. Democratic culture. Support for projects which develop democratic culture through training for local, regional and eventually national administrators. Analysis of the role of elders in governance should be undertaken.

4. Peace education. Support to projects which convey the message of a culture of peace to the people. This should be done in many ways, including mobile theatre and road shows, posters and other printed materials, T-shirts, and audio-visual materials, making full use of Somali artists, poets and singers and traditional themes of peace and reconciliation.

5. Basic education. Basic educational programmes, both formal and non-formal, should include training in non-violence, tolerance and dialogue as well as literacy and job skills. In this context, the UNESCO PEER

programme should be reinforced

6. Media. Media programmes, both local and regional, which convey a non-partisan message of a culture of peace. Radio broadcasting networks and local media should be mobilized for this purpose.

7. Women. Support to women's organizations so that they can take a prominent role in the process of rebuilding Somali society. Women should be empowered to take roles of responsibility in every level of the peace and democratic process.

8. NGOs. Recognition of the important role played by NGOs in humanitarian assistance and rehabilitation. Support and encouragement should be given to those Somali NGOs that contribute to these programmes and help promote a culture of peace in the Somali society.

9. Professional organizations. Support to Somali organizations of merchants, teachers, professors, doctors, scientists, artists and others along the lines of common interest and across the lines of clan identity enabling them to contribute to a culture of peace in their professional capacity.

10. Intellectuals. Support to Somali intellectuals, both inside and outside the country, to enable them to promote a culture of peace through their writings, speeches, conferences and other activities. To facilitate a broad and permanent dialogue, it is recommended the creation and dissemination of a directory of Somali intellectuals and organizations.

35. The Symposium concludes that the opportunities created by this remarkable gathering of Somali intellectuals in Sana'a should be fully exploited and therefore recognizes the need for a follow-up process. The Symposium requests that UNESCO, in coordination with other concerned international and regional organizations, should consider establishing a mechanism for this purpose.