

« Peace in the mind of men and women »

UNESCO celebrates the 25th anniversary of culture of peace

YAMOOUSSOUKRO, 21 – 24 SEPTEMBER 2014

Twenty-five years after its birth in the heat of Africa, the concept of culture of peace is back to its origins in Yamoussoukro. UNESCO and Côte D'Ivoire celebrate the start of a concept that has changed the way of understanding peace.

Indeed, it was during the International Congress of the UNESCO in 1989 in Yamoussoukro on the topic "Peace in the mind of men," that UNESCO adopted the vision whereby "Peace is more than the end of armed conflict "and where" peace is a behavior".

To commemorate this new idea twenty-five years ago - but also to demonstrate the increased relevance for our time - UNESCO and the Felix Houphouet-Boigny Foundation for Research of peace have again joined forces under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Côte D'Ivoire in Yamoussoukro by organizing a meeting entitled "Peace in the minds of men and women "on September 21 - 23, 2014.

This event had the dual aim of measuring the progress made since 1989 and to explore future opportunities, notably by launching the activities of the Network of foundations and research institutions to promote a culture of peace in Africa, established in September 2013 in Addis Ababa.

In order to showcase the willingness to face an international reality characterized by intolerance and extremism especially extremism backed by religious claims, the organizers wished to symbolize the beginning of the meeting by an ecumenical ceremony for peace. This ceremony was held in the Basilique Notre Dame de la Paix on September 21, the date of the International Day of Peace. Personalities such as the rector of the Basilica, the imam of the Grand Mosque of Yamoussoukro, a Methodist pastor and representatives of other religious communities attended the event.

On Monday September 22, the opening ceremony was marked by the tribute pay to the Minister Joachim Bony, Former Secretary General of the Houphouet-Boigny Foundation for Peace Research, as well as remarks delivered by Mrs. Albert Téoédjèrè, Ombudsman of the Republic of Benin, Jean Kouakou Gnrangbe, Mayor of the Commune of Yamoussoukro and John Christmas Loucou, Deputy Secretary General of the Houphouet-Boigny Foundation for Peace Research.

The celebration began with a video message from the Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova, who welcomed the commitment of the authorities of Côte d'Ivoire regarding peace. She labeled it as a testimony that "should guide us in our understanding of numerous crisis situations and violence in the world." She added that "We must respond with audacity, with a vision of peace in a broad sense, which goes well beyond the end of fighting, and reaches the heart of the human."

The Assistant Director-General of UNESCO for Africa, Lalla Aïcha Ben Barka, supported these comments and concluded that the culture of peace "is a victory of humanity over itself. Culture of Peace is a universal gift made by Africa to the world, a gift that calls for a counter-gift, because peace calls for peace."

The floor was then given to Mr Mohamed Sameh Amr, Chairman of the Executive Board of UNESCO and Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Egypt to UNESCO. He recalled the milestones that led to the proclamation in 1989 of the concept of culture of peace by UNESCO and its members States, and to its full adoption by the UN. One of its key pillars was undoubtedly the Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the children of the World (2001-2010). This decade, under the auspices of UNESCO, continues to influence the Decade for the rapprochement of Cultures (2013-2022), which focuses on intercultural and interreligious dialogue.

Various international and regional organizations were represented: African Union, African Development Bank, and the Mano River Union. Ms. Hiroute Guebre Sellassie - Special Envoy of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for the Sahel, underlined the need to "further develop strategic partnerships between UN agencies to ensure synergy in the actions and effectiveness in the results. In the context of my mission, I am committed to work in this direction

along with UNESCO and other partners to establish a culture of peace, a major tool for development and lasting stability."

In a video message, the former Director General of UNESCO, Federico Mayor welcomed the fact that thanks to efforts of UNESCO and its partners, Africa is now in the front-line of the culture of peace in the world, and he expressed the need to be inspired by Latin America, notably Bolivia and Ecuador, that have included the culture of peace in their constitution.

The celebration ended with a speech by Mr. Daniel Kablan Duncan, Prime Minister of the Ivorian Government, focusing on the importance given by his country regarding the culture of peace as a bridge towards national reconciliation after a period of post-election turmoil which plunged Côte D'Ivoire in a chaos.

In the afternoon, roundtables gave exposure to great witnesses of the culture of peace, some of whom were present at the creation of the concept 25 years ago.

Then the participants adopted the "Yamoussoukro +25" statement, in which they re-state the need to promote the culture of peace across the world. They pledged to participate in the implementation of the "International Decade for the Rapprochement of Cultures", the "Action Plan for a culture of peace in Africa". Participants wanted to support the creation of a "Biennial for culture of peace in Africa", as proposed by the Government of Angola to UNESCO. This recurring event will help to have a continuous review of the implementation of this program at the continental level.

The day ended with the ceremony on the delivery of the award on the mechanism of support "Springboard for youth social entrepreneurship and the culture of peace", organized by the Centre for Studies and Strategic Prospective (CEPS) in partnership with UNESCO. This award of \$ 10,000 was given to a young Ivorian entrepreneur to create an online training tool in the presence of the Minister of Culture and Francophonie representing the Prime Minister of the Republic of Côte D'Ivoire.

The other days were devoted to the Network of foundations and research institutions to promote a culture of peace in Africa created in 2013 at the headquarters of the African Union in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). Network members have defined their action plan for the next two years and the modalities of cooperation among them.

The Yamoussoukro Meetings ended on September 24 with the preparatory meeting for the 1st Biennial of the culture of peace in Africa, to be held in Luanda (Angola) in 2015.