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سازمان فرهنگ و ارتباطات اسلامی  
CULTURE & ISLAMIC RELATION ORGANIZATION (C.I.R.O)  
رابطة الثقافة والعلاقات الإسلامية

**Text of Speech of  
His Excellency Ayatollah Mahmoud Mohammadi Araqi  
President, Islamic Culture and Relations Organization  
Islamic Republic of Iran**

**At the Eight Session of the Ministers of Culture of INCP  
Dakar, Senegal  
November 21,22,2005**





## *In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful*

### **Mr. Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, respected audience:**

First and foremost, I would like to offer my greetings and express my gratitude to His Excellency, Minister of Culture of Senegal, and His Excellency Minister of Culture of Canada as well as all honorable ministers, participants, scholars, researchers, experts, planners, designers, and cultural managers of the member countries. I specially like to thank the cultural experts who are the main force behind this meeting and whose delicate taste introduces universal human values to the human society. I would like to express my gratitude to the INCP for accepting my country as a member and would like to inform you of the readiness of my country for mutual cultural cooperation.

My thanks are due to the INCP for its valuable role in the field of culture, information dissemination, education and research. The Organization of Islamic Culture and Relations<sup>i</sup> of the Islamic Republic of Iran is honored to cooperate with the INCP to promote cultural ties and activities – one of the main objectives of the INCP.

### **Respected audience**

It is not a hidden fact that culture in our world plays a very important role in the promotion of human talents. It also plays a strong role in various aspects of man's life, including in economic prosperity on international level.

Today, learned scholars make a distinction between the rich, constructive cultures and the irresponsible, instrumentalist cultural approaches. They emphasize on the genuine, non-commercial culture that have remained dynamic in all periods.

### **Protection of diverse intangible cultural heritages**

In the contemporary world, the trend of globalization has given rise to serious concerns about the unification of cultures and the globalized culture. This trend threatens the identity and independence of the longstanding cultures of human society. We observe that an attempt is underway on international level to artificially build culture by reliance on the modern means of communication which threatens the diverse intangible cultural heritage of mankind. We all know that the dynamism of human society is based on the diversity of intangible cultures and free flow of knowledge in all fields.

At the same time the trend of globalization and unification of cultures will lead to the alienation of individuals from their local cultures. The spread of this culture undermines the democratic cultures which will prepare the grounds for the reproduction of unpopular political systems. And all in all this will lead to crisis of identity with all its consequences.<sup>ii</sup>

Also contrary to the policy of protection of cultural diversity, it is seen that some cultures are overlooked in the authoritarian systems. A clear example is the culture of the oppressed Palestinian nation that has been neglected for more than half a century.



### **Ladies and gentlemen**

It is evident that religions and culture are closely linked. Respect to religious minorities is respect to cultural diversity. Let me inform you, Excellencies, that the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran has envisaged the rights of the religious minorities and granted special advantages to them. The supreme Council of Cultural Revolution has enacted a law on the protection of cultural diversity.<sup>iii</sup> All recognized religious minorities – Jews, Christians, Armenians and Zoroastrians – regardless of their demographic strength have their directly elected representatives in the Parliament. They have their own schools, high schools, churches, temples, Knesset, etc. The law even grants them the right to have their own judicial courts for their private affairs.

Indeed, the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that political participation becomes meaningful when cultural diversity is respected.

### **Social coherence and intangible cultural diversity**

In fact history, religions, language, customs, norms, cultural, social and local institutions can be the consolidating elements of the national identity and social and spiritual coherence among human community.<sup>iv</sup>

The countries with a diverse intangible culture and a longstanding history and cultural diversity enjoy a specific cultural status in the contemporary world. Let me give you a clear example: cultural developments in Iran during the Islamic period. The intangible cultural heritage of Iran intermingled with those of Islam during the Islamic period, giving rise to an attractive diverse heritage. It played an effective role in the perfection of the Iranian identity. The Islamic Republic of Iran has a precious practical experience and is ready to share it with the interested honorable members of the INCP. Excellencies, you are well aware that on the suggestion of former Iranian president, Mohammad Khatami, the year 2001 was designated as the Year of Dialogue among Civilizations by the United Nations.

### **Cultural diversity in interaction between material and spiritual development**

One of the main concerns of the developing countries is finding a balanced development model. Many countries rely on the experiences of the developed countries. Development models will work in any country when they logically interact with the cultural diversity of that country. The Islamic Republic of Iran has experienced the effective role of diverse intangible culture in the process of sustainable development.

In fact, sustainable development will be meaningful only when different societies develop in a balance manner. Hence it is necessary to prepare the grounds for a practical access of all nations to various branches of knowledge, science and technology. The developed countries must bear in mind that all members of the international community are all members of the same family and have a common fate. A fair transfer of technology and technical know-how will pave the way for sustainable development in the entire world. In this regard any double-standard or selective approach should be avoided.

According to His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, the General Secretary of the United Nations, the future challenge of the world will be that of education. A fair transfer of modern technological know-how will help us to promote education in the world. Hence, all societies should have access to clean energy, all should be able to preserve their non-renewable resources for the future generations, and all are entitled to have access to the latest technologies which are the heritages of mankind and do not exclusively belong to any specific nation or country. Hence, no country should be deprived of its natural rights to peaceful nuclear technology.



In the end, let me offer few suggestions to the INCP for the promotion of cultural cooperation:

**Suggestions:**

1 – Strengthening media cooperation in order to have a better knowledge of different cultures to prevent the domination of the media empire over the international public opinion.

2 – Attempts to prepare the grounds for fair access to the Internet and satellites in order to promote cultural diversity and mutual understanding.

3 – Setting up a committee on the dialogue among religions and cultures to promote mutual understanding and finding commonalities and universal human values to consolidate international peace, security and sustainable development.

4 – Paying more attention to education and volunteer transfer of technology, technological know-how, and practical experiences by the developed countries to the developing countries to achieve sustainable development.

5 – Exchange of cultural products among the INCP member countries and moving towards setting up a common market for the cultural products and participation in the production of films, CDs, etc.

6 – Yearly selection of cities and villages as symbols of cultural diversity and setting up of a working committee to promote cultural diversity.

7 – The Islamic Republic of Iran suggests that to host the INCP session in 2008 in the city of Isfahan (Due to its historical monuments and cultural heritages, the city was designated as the Cultural Capital of the Islamic World in 2006 by the OIC.)

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<sup>1</sup> The Organization of Islamic Culture and Relations has signed cultural agreements with 110 countries and has cultural offices in 62 countries.

<sup>2</sup> In fact the cultural and economic globalizations meet each other in situations like the recent unrests in France. These unrests unveil the inequalities inherent in globalization which stem from the negligence of local cultures and religions. In his first public speech after the recent unrests, the French President Jacques Chirac announced: The recent unrests unveiled the crisis of identity in France.

<sup>3</sup> All provinces of Iran besides Persian broadcast their programs in local languages; each province has its media in local languages and according to the recent enactment of the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution, local languages are to be taught at the local educational institutions.

<sup>4</sup> The recent unrests in France unveil the inequalities inherent in globalization which stem from the negligence of local cultures and religions. The said developments have drawn the attention of the public opinion to the rights of religious minorities. Condemning the violence, the Islamic Republic of Iran underlined the significance of cultural diversity and justice.