

**Asia-Europe People's Forum 5  
Hanoi, September 6-9, 2004**

**Workshop on “Dialogue of Civilisations, Cultures and Religions in Europe  
and Asia”**

**Focal organizers:** Vietnam Union of Friendship Organizations (VUFO), Forum Asia,  
Centre Lebret

In the past Asia-Europe People's Forum, the subject of spiritualities and identities was introduced as an additional important dimension in the Asia-Europe dialogue. More particularly in Seoul (2000), it was taken up in relation to globalization, or more precisely as a reaction to the single, dominant thinking imposed by economic and financial globalization, pushing forward the importance of the human dimension and the diversity of cultures and approaches.

For the Forum in Hanoi, the organizers propose to continue with the reflection and debate with a workshop on Dialogue of civilizations, cultures and religions in Europe and Asia. The reality of this question has always been present in Asian and European societies and it has become all the more central with 9-11 and its aftermath, whereby the demonization of Islam, and the US' war on terror has had grave consequences on people's lives in Asia and Europe.

However, we who are involved in the different struggles for social transformation should look at the dialogue of civilizations not only as an approach to resolving inter-ethnic or inter-religious conflicts, nor to simply limit or prevent war. It goes further as it looks into the real causes of such conflicts on the one hand, and into constructing a new vision and a new humanity on the other, nourished by historical experiences and diverse approaches.

Its basis is the diversity of cultures wherein dialogue contains more than simply talking to each other. It means there is not one dominant civilization. It looks at particular identities but also at the essence of global humankind. It comes within the universal aspiration for peace and security; but it also means the diversity and complementarity of approaches, concrete responses. As civilizations refer to groups of people who share certain ways of organizing their societies, this dialogue cannot ignore people's struggles against poverty and exclusion.

**SLOT 1: Towards clash, exclusion or dialogue?**

**Moderator:**

JACQUELINE HEINRICH

*°Ms. Heinrich is in the Administrative Board of Centre International Lebret-IRFED. Her organization is based in Paris, France and is one of the organizers of the ASEM People's Forum.*

**Speakers:**

CHANDRA MUZAFFAR

*°Dr. Muzaffar is from Malaysia. He has a PhD in Political Science and is president of the International Movement for a Just World or JUST. JUST is an NGO that focuses on global injustices and civilizational dialogue.*

DUONG TRUNG QUOC

*°Mr. Quoc, a historian and journalist, is General Secretary of the association of historians in Vietnam and Editor-in-Chief of the review “Past and Present”. Also, he is a member of the Vietnamese National Assembly and of the Vietnam-USA Friendship Association.*

JOHN BRINKMAN

*°John Brinkman is a Maryknoll priest whose PhD deals with the history of religions in East Asia and Japan. His recent research focuses on ecology and religion. He has participated in the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change. His current work centers on the Commission of Ecology and Religion: He is based in Tokyo, Japan.*

FRANCOIS HOUTART

*°François Houtart is director of the Centre Tricontinental (CETRI) and the journal « Alternatives Sud », Louvain, Belgium. He has written numerous books and articles on globalization, religions and cultures.*

**Commentator:**

GOTHAM ARYA

*°Mr. Arya is from Thailand and formerly Election Commissioner of Thailand. Currently, he is Secretary-General of Forum-Asia, a regional human rights organization. He is a non-violence activist.*

**SLOT 2 : Cultural diversities and globalization : responses at national, regional and Euro-Asian levels**

**Moderator:**

STEPANUS DJUWENG

*°Mr. Djuweng is a Dayak (an indigenous group in Indonesia) from Kalimantan, Indonesia. He is the executive secretary of SEGERAK, the Union of Movements for the Empowerment of the Dayak Peoples, an NGO based in Kalimantan.*

**Speakers:**

ALIM BANDARA

*°Mr. Bandara is from Maguindanao Province in the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. He is a tribal chieftain of the Teduray tribe. His presentation focuses on the “threats and challenges of globalization to the lumad (indigenous people).*

EFFENDIE TANUMIHARDJA

*°Mr. Tanumihardja is mechanical engineer and a Buddhist. He lectures on engineering and Buddhism philosophy in various universities (including the Catholic*

*university) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He is an officer of the Yogyakarta Interfaith Foundation, whose aim is to build real brotherhood among different faiths and religions.*

MINATA SAMAKE

*°Thirty years ago, Ms. Samake came to France from Mali, Africa at the age of 9. She is responsible for the administration of the various cooperation projects between Montreuil, a suburb in Paris, and the cities of Yelimane in Mali and Hai Duong in Vietnam.*

NYIMA TSERING

*°Mr. Tsering is a Tibetan Monk and is the keeper of the Jokhang Temple in Lhasa, Tibet. This temple is the most sacred temple and considered a world heritage.*

### **Note Taker**

TERESITA DE GUIA

## POINTS NOTED FROM INPUTS OF SLOT 1

**A. Chandra Muzaffar's** input centers on his premise that their power relations determine the encounters between religions or civilizations. To better understand such encounters one has to delve into their power relationships.

Seldom do religious or civilization conflicts arise from religious or doctrinal matters but usually spring from political or economic causes. Seemingly, these conflicts or encounters revolve around power or perceptions of power.

Muzaffar cites the encounter between Islam and the West as the best illustration of this relationship. The historical encounters of Islam and the West since the 7<sup>th</sup> century and until today show the wielding of power by one entity over another: the Crusades, the colonial conquests, and today the dominance of the West over the world has reached hegemonic proportions.

Today, the West continues to dominate the Middle East, its territories and resources, with the support of Israel and Zionism. The entire Muslim world is powerless. However, a fringe within the international Muslim community has responded to this reality with violence even if it violates Muslim teachings. But that violent fringe will continue to exist as long as hegemony continues to exist—the US, Britain, Israel.

Religion cannot overcome hegemony unless it transforms itself from being “exclusive and more inclusive, less sectarian and more universal, less ritualistic and more values-based in their approach and orientation”. Thus, the internal struggles in religions will determine the struggle of humankind as a whole.

**B. Francois Houtart** defines culture as the whole representation of reality and all its expressions (language, art, religion, etc.), where human beings are able to represent their thoughts and ideas, analyze, and interpret these into action. Culture is important in the relationships of the human being to nature and to their social relations.

The institutionalization of culture brings in the creation of roles, of organizations, of vested interests and linkages with political and economic institutions, and there, conflicts are created especially between competitive cultural systems (or religions). Often, economic or political systems or ideologues use culture to explain or legitimize such conflicts.

Clash of civilizations can only occur when cultures or religions are linked with economic or political interests. Hence, dialogue of civilizations can only be conceived within a general framework that includes the realities of economic and political relationships and with an approach that considers history.

The role of culture is to enable social actors to develop critical judgments and to anticipate the future -- but always within a given context.

Religion is part of culture which refers to the supernatural and as the group would define it. It has various social functions depending on the type of societies. For instance, when life is totally linked with nature, central to the interpretation of reality is the relationship to nature and the earth. In pre-capitalist society religion was used to legitimize the appropriation of resources. In conflict situations, the conflicts were given religious terms like crusades, reconquistas, etc. Until today this is happening like when G. W. Bush said that God was with him in his decision to wage war on Iraq.

There are three necessary conditions in order for dialogue to happen:

First, the problem must be raised in its context of socio-economics and politics. In this reality, it is seen that capitalist globalization is a fundamental obstacle as shown in economic control and exploitation, political and military controls, cultural imposition of economic values, unequal distribution of technical achievements, etc.

Second, the religious legitimization of political oppression, violence and terrorism must be avoided. And lastly, the state has to be secular and pluralist. Not a state that is formed, controlled and guided by religion and beliefs.

Given these conditions, the dialogue may be done on these levels:

The first level is at the base. There has to be a common struggle for justice at the local, national and international levels. Another level is that of institutions for example between or among cultural and religious bodies like ecumenical platforms, a parliament of religions, etc. Lastly, on the level of intellectuals (theologians, ideologues, etc.) translate theories and knowledge into popular form or the popularization of knowledge.

**C. Duong Trung Quoc's** presentation looks into the reform process in Vietnam and its colonial past and how Vietnam will proceed in the future in the face of globalization.

The history of Vietnam is seen in the mix of Chinese, French and Vietnam cultures. Likewise, there is a mix of religions, Catholic, Protestant, and Buddhist and other local beliefs.

Geographically, Vietnam is in Southeast Asia and far from Europe. But, with colonial expansion the Europeans came. A Catholic priest brought the Catholic religion in the 17<sup>th</sup> century although in the past the Vietnamese already saw harmony in Buddhism. The French stayed on and until now Vietnam is a member of French-speaking countries even if the use of the French language has already fallen into disuse as English has now replaced it.

Aside from the French influence, Chinese influence is also prevalent as Vietnam is bordering China and is linked to the Silk Road. The first time Vietnam opened itself to China, it accepted the Chinese characters but found a way to Romanize it. Today, the Vietnamese still use chopsticks.

Other cultures as well—Russian, American, Japanese – have come to Vietnam. This has made the Vietnamese more inclined to dialogue and more open to the outside world. Vietnam has learned to live in harmony with other people despite its history of foreign oppression. Its people have also been able to adapt to Western values.

Religion is more for harmony than conflict. But in Vietnam's history, Christianity was affected by politics. The government needs to give respect to the right to religion and beliefs. If this is not done there can be no harmony in society. More division will happen if the government will not learn how to deal with religions.

There are about 15 million Vietnamese who are members of other religions. But there was never a religious war in Vietnam. For example, the 100,000 Muslims in Vietnam have become part of Vietnamese society. In Vietnam, every religion for that matter has become part of the society as a whole.

There were many war crimes during the US-Vietnam war but the Vietnamese people must look to the future. But, not to be forgotten is that when Ho Chi Minh declared independence he quoted from the American and French Constitutions. The integration process is voluntary but Vietnam is pressured by the ongoing development process. The integration into the World Trade Organization will be a new challenge and again a new value to be learned is interdependence. But, the Vietnamese will continue to value the chopsticks and the French language.

**D. John Brinkman's** topic Ecology and Religion as Dimensions of Security takes off from the viewpoint that one area of global concern, where Asia is most vulnerable, is the problem of environmental security.

The approach to be sought should take into account the "sacred dimensions of the phenomenal order of things". That true security lies in a "healthy and non-pathological relationship with nature.

Development can be sustainable when social development and environmental protection become integral parts of human development. For developing countries, especially South Asia, the concept of environment and security need to be defined within the context of sustainable development. The challenge of environment and security in South Asia is distinctly a problem of institutions and governance.

There has been a shift on the concept of security -- from "national security" (security from external threat) there is now greater emphasis on "human security". Human security is "human well-being: not only protection from harm and injury but access to water, food and other basic requisites due to every person on the earth.

If nations do not take up the environmental challenge beyond their borders then they must take up the responsibility of their own domestic environmental challenges.

Brinkman proposes the concept of a bioregion which is a distinct unit of environmental and security concern that is distinct from the nation-state. The Mekong River Basin is an example of this concept.

**E.** The commentary of **Gotham Arya** raises three issues and presents three recommendations.

First, the issue of complexity of the world situation that comes with history. For example, in the pre-modern times, there was colony-building or civilization-building where each civilization is a human achievement. Modern times shifted colonization to the building of nation-states in order to preserve power. Today the post-modern period, complexity is shown in the processes of uniformity and hegemony-building and in inter-nation and equity-building. All of these processes are going on: at different times and at different places, at the same time and place.

Hegemony or empire-building leads to violence and to clash in the face of hopelessness that comes from within. However, the process of dialogue has to happen in this complexity but dialogue has to be done not against the United States but with the United States.

Second is the issue of dilemma. The dilemma is this: we know what we are against but we do not know what we want.

No society is a monolithic bloc and civilization has been evolving because it has kept in touch with other civilizations. Society is socially constructed and not nature-determined. Thus, it can and could change. Civilizations, cultures, and religion can both unify and divide and attain unity and diversity. Dialogue or debate can lead to transformation. But, dialogue is also threatening due to the fear of losing identity.

Third issue is that everybody agrees to dialogue. This can only be possible if done with humility and with the attitude of learning and building dialogue based on knowledge or facts. Other elements necessary for this dialogue is that it cannot be in abstract form but contextualized within the socio-economic configuration. Furthermore, dialogue has to be done between and among individuals and institutions.

Dialogue must address institutions and entered into with humility and an attitude to learn, with the hope of change, and a strong will for peace. Dialogue must produce results as most of the time good rhetoric is employed but implementation is weak.

Three recommendations are deemed necessary:

1. Governments and non-government organizations (NGOs) alike should promote a culture of peace in their non-formal educational programs especially through the mass media. Education for peace and tolerance and not to emphasize on one national identity at the expense of the neighbors. Content of formal education should be carefully reviewed to eliminate prejudices, stereotypes, historical distortions, etc.
2. ASEM member governments should review their cultural exchange programs and direct these towards a genuine exchange and greater participation of stakeholders in ASEM deliberations of social issues and conflicts.
3. Civil society should engage in dialogue between different cultures and religion and go beyond simple exchange of views and emphatic listening to encompass a search for common principles in which to base harmonized actions for peace.

## CLARIFICATIONS/COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS - SLOT 1

- In every religion there are progressive trends. Dialogue between religious communities has been going on for quite a long time now. For Protestants, on the level of the World Council of Churches and for Buddhists that of Sulak Sivaraksa and his group the Engaged Buddhists. Islam and Buddhism are looking at politics. Any attempt to promote dialogue based on theological concerns will not go far. It should be based on issues and common platforms. In this attempt to dialogue we must address the question of power.

- Regarding the law in France which is now affecting very much the Muslim women: In France, there used to be a tradition of cooperation between religion and state but now there is already a separation of state and religion. This separation is good. Today there is now the law linked to the laicization or secularization of state schools wherein students are not allowed to display any form or sign of religious beliefs. This has affected Muslim women strongly regarding their use of the veil. But one does not change culture by law.

- Dialogues should include everybody even atheists. Of course, atheism or humanist atheism is a philosophical position. So, dialogue should not exclude this. At the first level of dialogue, it is acting or working together with different references and values... but meeting together. Then, we have to enlarge to include not only the religious people.

- Culture is not a museum. It changes and evolves. But, change should be voluntary and not to be imposed. For example, in Vietnam its strength is in the long history of its culture. More than any other country Vietnam is capable of resisting the culture of the market. Vietnam is in the position to use its traditional values to critique the market value.

- Vietnamese culture has been affected by French and Chinese cultures and is an agricultural society. However, with the onset of globalization Vietnamese society has been altered. While majority of its people were farmers now this group is diminished.

- The world is better served with the preservation of biodiversity.

- Human solidarity, before individual solidarity, is needed to critique the present. Religion and culture calls us to an integrity beyond ourselves (individuals).

## **POINTS NOTED FROM INPUTS OF SLOT 2**

A. Significant to Alim Bandara's presentation is the context of the "tri-people" of Mindanao wherein he says that these three groups of people have their own distinct culture: the Lumads or indigenous people, the Bangsa Moro who have traditional ways but have embraced Islam and the Christian settlers who came from other parts of the country.

Mr. Bandara cites that globalization through the government's integration program together with neighbors Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia has assaulted the very heart of the Lumad's culture and life. For the Lumads, nature is their source of knowledge, power and life. The ancestral domain claims of the Lumads have been ignored with the continuing implementation of the government's development projects. Slowly, the Lumads had to relent to the onslaught of globalization. Like all the rest of the tri-people, the Lumads now have to go to the towns and other urban areas to look for employment opportunities. Those who remain in the rural areas realize that they have to contend with the cash economy. In order to survive, the Lumads have transformed rituals and tribal symbols into "effective tools of negotiation and dialogue and to build solidarity and common action.

Thus, in the diversity of the cultures of the tri-people, the Lumads seek unity as all these problems also affect the Bangsa Moro and the Christian settlers.

With the pursuit for unity, the Lumads seek a development that will not alienate them from nature, that respects their collective leadership, preserves communal ownership of property, recognizes their equal status in society, assures peace of mind and physical well being of community members and ensures progressive pluralism among the tri-people and the rest of the Filipino people.

The study of Mr. Tanumihardja shows the Chinese experience in Indonesia in the context of Indonesian, Javanese and Chinese cultures and realities. Currently, Indonesia is predominantly Moslem and other religions comprise the Hindus, Buddhists, Protestants and Catholics. It has 370 ethnic groups and 400 languages. Of the ethnic groups the Javanese is the largest with the Chinese comprising only 3%. Although only 7 million (out of 220 million), the contribution of the Chinese to the economy and culture of Indonesia is considered significant.

It asserts that relationships of Chinese Buddhists, the Javanese and the Moslems were harmonious before the coming of the Dutch colonizers. Historical data even shows that the Moslems entered Java as part of the Chinese and Moslem Mongolian Army. It was during the colonial period that the Chinese were "collected" and restricted in a specific area or district. Clearly, clash occurred with the entry of economic and political interests.

He gave a brief overview of the clash occurring in the Indonesian society. From the 18<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Chinese, majority of which are Buddhists, have been systematically oppressed and persecuted during the Dutch colonization, after

independence and during both the Sukarno and Suharto eras. The height of this clash was in 1998 when the object of the racial riots was the Chinese. Rapes were committed. Houses and buildings owned by the Chinese were raided and set on fire. A brief peaceful existence came with the administration of President Wahid (Gus Dur).

This is the challenge facing the Yogyakarta Interfaith Forum, the organization of Mr. Tanumihardja:

- To let the people of Indonesia understand that the conflict did not arise from ethnic and religious differences but is due to the pursuit of political and economic profits by some groups.
- To give witness to the real values of peace and brotherhood that can bring together people of all faiths.

On another level, Ms. Samake shared experiences of how France can reach out in a dialogue of cooperation with former colonial territories. In the process, former colonies themselves have a direct exchange, culturally and otherwise. Ms. Samake, a Malian living in France is responsible for these projects with former colonies in a dialogue of realistic cooperation among: the French people in the city of Montreuil, the people in the province of Yelimane in Mali, Africa and the people in Hai Duong District in Vietnam.

The exchanges or dialogues consist of technical cooperation that would strengthen the independent socio-economic and political capabilities of the people in Yelimane and Hai Duong. Technical projects supported by the local government in Montreuil, France and other French NGOs in the area range from hydraulics, hygiene and sanitation, preventive health; education and training and micro agricultural projects.

However, hand-in-hand with this are the cultural cooperation activities that are directed at enhancing their specificity as francophones. These are in the form of French language competitions, supply of French books, setting up of French courses in the local schools and follow-up activities to promote the French culture and language. Thus, continuing and even strengthening the ties that were initiated during the colonial times.

Nyima Tsering, a Buddhist monk from Tibet spoke on the success of Tibetan culture and religion to be able to enjoy the “freedom of religious belief and protection of state laws.” In essence, the presentation highlighted the harmonious co-existence of all religions – Catholicism, Christianity, Islam and all other religions in Tibet – and the lack of conflict among the religions. But, of course, almost all are Buddhists in Tibet.

The paper read by Mr. Tsering outlined and emphasized that with the social reforms done by China in Tibet the country has become more open. Dialogues through communications with peoples from the East and the West have allowed Westerners to find equilibrium and peace from Tibetan Buddhism. Thus, the monk Nyima Tsering is urging that “Westerners should listen attentively to the guidance of Eastern wisdom and try to achieve internal peace and happiness under the merciful guidance of Buddha”.

The challenge faced by the China Association for Preservation and Development of Tibetan Culture, headed by Nyima Tsering, is to seek a balance between preservation and development and between tradition and modernization.

## **CLARIFICATIONS/COMMENTS/DISCUSSIONS**

- Responding to the question of gender roles in the Teduray tribe, it was said that there is no discrimination among men and women. Women are given leadership positions provided they are capable. As to the issue of land ownership, there are lands that are owned by the government. These are called public lands. There are lands that can be owned by the people and these are called disposable and alienable lands. The Lumads have presented their claims for their ancestral lands or ancestral domains. But these are now mostly considered public lands. The agrarian reform program of the government has many problematic policies that allow conversion of lands.

- As to the situation of Buddhists in Asia: In 1964 Buddhism became known as a religion together with Protestantism and Catholicism. In Indonesia there are 100 monks and 1 monk is in charge of seven to ten vijara or temples.

In Tibet almost all local people are Buddhists. There are other religions in Tibet but the major religion is Buddhism. There are about 46,000 monks and many Buddhist followers. Solidarity and friendship is practiced with other religions.

Buddhism teaches that if you practice compassion then peace comes.

Dialogue is possible if one does not go into Theology: People share what they can do and on the daily basis.

- In the South of Thailand, it is predominantly Muslim and there's conflict. But the conflict is not between the Thai and the Malay but with the authorities. The authorities want the Malay to become Thai through education and sending of Thai officials to govern them. Now the conflict has escalated to violence. Dialogue can only be done if there is respect of multiculturalism.

- Two of the presentations discussed both clash and dialogues while the other two offered experiences or insights on their experiences of dialogue and cooperation. The Philippine and Indonesian experience cited the clash with power structures and how their efforts are directed at dialogue/negotiation/people solidarity/networking to meet the challenges. On the other hand, the African and Tibetan experiences showed their efforts at dialogue/cooperation/integration with structures of power that were sources of cultural and/or political clash in their historical past.

## **SOME PROPOSED RECOMMENDATIONS:**

1. Brinkman proposes the concept of a bioregion, which is a distinct unit of environmental, and security concern that is distinct from the nation-state. The Mekong River Basin as one bioregion could be an example of this concept. Thus, he calls on ASEM governments to recognize that for Asia and in particular for developing countries, environment and security are inextricably linked to sustainable development and to the core problem of institutions and governance that must be in place in order to respond and resolve this essential regional challenge.
2. Governments and non-government organizations (NGOs) alike should promote a culture of peace in their non-formal educational programs especially through the mass media. Education for peace and tolerance and not to emphasize on one national identity at the expense of the neighbors. Content of formal education should be carefully reviewed to eliminate prejudices, stereotypes, historical distortions, etc.
3. ASEM member governments should review their cultural exchange programs and direct these towards a genuine exchange and greater participation of stakeholders in ASEM deliberations of social issues and conflicts.
4. Civil society should engage in dialogue between different cultures and religion and go beyond simple exchange of views and emphatic listening to encompass a search for common principles in which to base harmonized actions for peace.