

## **Cultural Pluralism and Peace through inter-religious and international dialogue**

Peace and harmonious coexistence consist the main pursuit of people over time. The good of world peace expresses that universal craving for prosperity, progress and a conscious life, possessed by the ideals of respect, diversity, acceptance, solidarity and understanding. Citizens of all countries have jumped in all areas and overcome pathogens of centuries when they acted under Peace.

Nevertheless, peace is not for granted. Over the last decades, major changes have brought new shape to the global scene. The resurgence of conflicts and the escalation of violence in many parts of the world are a cause for concern and questioning among people around the world.

Cultural and religious differences, instead of being a point of rapprochement and communication among the peoples, are taken as a reason for disputes, fanaticism and crimes of all kinds.

Even in the Western world, there is a constant increase in intolerant voices, fanatics and extreme political forces, targeting helpless or culturally diverse fellow citizens, making them responsible for deadlocks and mistakes that they are not responsible for.

This type of rhetoric is directly against democracy and peace, and the global community should be vigilant because it is very likely the ghosts of the past to wake up again: Recently, in the German elections, the far-right and xenophobic AFD party has emerged as the third parliamentary force. Democrats around the world must look for the underlying causes of these situations, which are repeated to a greater or lesser extent throughout the world and speak honestly about their omissions.

The destabilization of the Middle East and the large refugee waves that have begun from these countries, as well as the religious fundamentalism developed there, are not unrelated to each other. Obviously, there is a huge responsibility of the great powers for the Middle East crisis. The decisions for violent changes in leaderships and regimes, namely imperialist interventions, the supply of weapons, and apathy to casualties with innocent civilians, as well as the destructive management of the refugee issue, are black pages of modern reality.

Let's not forget that many times the Western world has supported and funded leaders in order to rise to power, and decades after it destroyed them.

Europe today is plagued by dozens of terrorist blows. The war of civilizations revives in the worst way. Rich versus the poor, "natives against" foreigners", believers versus non-believers. Even within the European Union stereotypes dominate, turning into political arguments without sufficient documentation. Recently, for example, the

statement was made that the "southern" Europeans were wasting their money on alcohol and women.

How far from the truth is all this?

It seems that we are in the face of a deeper crisis that afflicts Western culture and the whole world. A crisis, which certainly has a material basis but extends to the level of perceptions, way of life and values.

Let's make two important remarks:

There is a gradual shift in power from the West to the East today. These rearrangements create changes in material conditions and therefore bring about changes in people's everyday lives. Social contracts and the acquisitions for decades are being called into question. And here we have to be clear: Peace and justice are inextricably linked concepts. In the modern world, these two concepts have been linked to another synonym: **sustainable development**. Poverty and social inequalities remain the worst type of violence. When citizens are deprived of the basic means for their survival, it is not strange to adopt extreme beliefs and doctrines to fill the void they feel, the gap that exists.

So let us first agree that peace and security can be established by the concern for social justice and development of the poorest societies of the planet. It is a tragic political mistake to allow, because of arrogance and political choices, the army of impoverished people.

2. The values upon which the newer societies have been based, the values that derive from the Enlightenment and from the religious-spiritual traditions of every people, suffer shocks.

Traditional perceptions as well as political perceptions about equality, democracy, justice, brotherhood and the harmonious co-operation of the citizens, which were seen as life commands and goals, which used to give importance to human life, are now on the sidelines.

The displacement of these beliefs, from the ideals of extreme consumerism and competitive neo-liberalism, dominated by the unambiguous attachment to materialistic fanciful prosperity and competition among citizens, to a primitive condition, to whoever prevails in power, money and resources, has altered the attitudes and habits of extended social layers. It is no longer important the human and the personality or human relations but who will prevail in this relentless battle of evolution and selfishness.

"I don't know what a man is. Only that every man has his price", wrote Berthold Brecht.

How true this sounds today, that life itself is not meant as self-esteem but as a tool for pursuing other purposes. A society that produces such competition is definitely a raw material for the resurgence of conflicts.

In the light of this, it is necessary to open up an honest dialogue at international level, which will result in concrete practical interventions aimed at promoting peace and alleviating differences and inequalities.

Greece, my country, has, in practice and with a multitude of initiatives, highlighted the importance of peace, friendship and cooperation among the peoples, as well as its firm attachment to the rules of international law.

In spite of the severe financial crisis that plagues the country, we welcomed in the best possible way the caravans of the refugees who fled to the shores of our homeland on their way to Europe when other European countries raised xenophobic and other stereotypical perceptions.

At the same time, the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2015 successfully organized an international conference on "**Religious and cultural pluralism and peaceful coexistence in the Middle East**". A Greek initiative to coordinate efforts in order to protect Christian populations and respect multiculturalism and multi-religions in the Middle East. One of the main goals of the Greek diplomatic initiative was to highlight the role of religious leaders in defending human life and their contribution to achieving peaceful coexistence in dignity and mutual understanding. In addition, the Greek side has decided and organized in the last two years a series of multilateral regional conferences with a view to promoting cooperation and stability in the Mediterranean Sea and the troubled Middle East.

Last but not least, in April 2017, Greece, in cooperation with China, convened in Athens the international "FORUM of Ancient Civilizations" with the participation of ten countries, representing ancient civilizations. There was emphasized the common vision of all of us to exploit the cultural heritage of the past as a vehicle for promoting friendly relations, international cooperation, peace, stability and prosperity today.

Based on the above, it would not be an exaggeration, if we argued, that Greece is a pioneering force in the promotion of the values of peace and multiculturalism. Its insistence on the dialogue on stability in the Mediterranean and the Middle East should exemplify many European countries.

Today, therefore, experiencing these world-historic changes, is more than ever necessary, to find ways to promote a positive cooperation agenda but also to deepen democracy. The parliaments and elected representatives of the people should not be satisfied with a formal policy role.

Their actions and their views need to encourage a) to deepen democracy b) to involve citizens in the decision-making process c) to eliminate social inequalities d) to peace and nuclear disarmament and e) to respect and show tolerance to cultural and all kinds of diversification.

And let's keep in mind the lyrics of one of the most important Greek poets, Tassos Livaditis:

“If you want to be a human you will never stop, not even a moment, to fight for peace and for the right. You will go out on the streets, you will cry, your lips will bleed from the voices and your face will bleed from the spheres - not a step back, though”