

*African Initiative on Education for Peace and Development through
Interreligious and Inter-cultural Dialogue*



REPUBLIC OF BENIN
Ministry of Higher Education
and Scientific Research



*International Symposium for the Launching of
The African Initiative on Education
for Peace and Development through
Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Dialog*
Cotonou, 26th to 28th of May 2015

Pan-African Centre for Social Prospects

This Symposium, is placed under the aegis of
Benin's Ministry of
Higher Education and Scientific Research

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NB :

The presentation logo of the African Initiative is an adaptation of that used by « **TCHADINFOS.COM** » in an article written by XINHUA (<http://tchadinfos.com/afrique/bientt-une-initiative-africaine-lducation-paix-dialogue-islamochrtien/#ixzz39sVrSPg0>) with the difference that “ **R**” is replaced with “**SHANGO**”, the symbol of the God of Thunder and used as “ **Ouidah 92 : Cultural event logo**” .

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AU :	African Union
CPPS :	Centre Panafricain de Prospectives Sociale (CPPS)
ECCAS :	Economic Community of Central African States
ECOWAS :	Economic Community of West African States
EMCCAS:	Economic and Monetary Community of Central African States
EU :	European Union
NATO :	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
UEMOA:	Union Economique et Monétaire de l'Ouest Africain
UN	United Nations
UNAOC :	United Nations Agency of Alliance of Civilizations
UNDP :	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO :	United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization
UNS	United Nations System

AS A PRELUDE...

"Fact evokes idea, idea begets experience... "

January 7th 2015, i.e. the date of completion of the drafting of this project document, was also the day of the deadly confirmation of a dirty global war against the intellect (psyche), freedom and progress. This was the date of the violent attack on "Charlie Hebdo", a satirical weekly magazine published in France, coldly perpetrated by fanatical, religious and cultural illiterates, chanting slogans entirely antithetical to all beliefs in God in all the languages of this world which is henceforth threatened with massive destruction wreaked by the invasion of barbarians from another age and the stubbornness of obstinate and intolerant agitators.

Killings, mutilations and above all... deeply stirred, traumatized and yet divided international opinion...

A similar case occurred in New York on 11th September. **And this is a daily occurrence in Palestine or in Israel, in Somalia or in Nigeria.**

Yet, that very date of 7th January 2015 was also the day when the French Imams representing the Muslim communities of this same country, met with Pope Francis in Rome to reaffirm the brotherhood of Abraham's sons and their commitment to peace and development. Their sincerity was sacrosanct.

On that day also, an authorized voice representing the African traditional religions in the small haven of peace of Benin Republic, forcefully proclaimed as never done before, "We too are sons of Abraham!" What a pathetic moment in the universal history of mankind.

The time has really come to spring forth poles that would arouse genuine hope from Iraq to Central Africa. It's time to launch with UNESCO and the Alliance of Civilizations, the *"African Initiative of Education on Peace and Development through Interreligious and Intercultural dialog"* ... with respect for others' faith and restraint from any act of gratuitous provocation.

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Though, with the exception of Nigeria, countries of the Sahel and the Horn of Africa, other African states are to a lesser extent faced with immediate and direct terrorist threats, the fact remains that with the recent evolution of the situation, all African countries have a number of features that could make them more vulnerable to this scourge that has risen to a transnational dimension. Young jihadists fighting for an Islamic State in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan and elsewhere are recruited in virtually every country in the world.



The geographic location of Benin, its proximity to a neighboring country affected by this problem, coupled with the porous borders and the relatively weak capacities of the country in terms of anticipation (disaster preparedness), intelligence and response (strike-back/matching) could make it a vulnerable spot.

Prominent among the deep concerns of this country, is the imminent threat faced by Cameroon whose army is on the defensive against the expansionist thrust of the Boko Haram insurgency which is trying to export its murderous ideology to the Cameroonian territory. The situation in the Central African Republic, which is desperately striving to emerge from the chaos into which it was plunged by turning religions into a mere tool for political purposes, is not encouraging.

Religious extremism generally thrives on a socio-economic and cultural soil that is characterized by bad governance, injustice, marginalization, ethnic discrimination, social discrimination, economic discrimination (inequality/disparity between regions within the same country), etc. and the use of religion as a weapon for demonstrations (protests/claims) and political causes. This is the situation that the Federal Republic of Nigeria is facing with the Islamist Boko Haram sect whose leader, Abubakar Shekau,

had kidnapped in mid-April 2014 in the northeast of the country, two hundred and fifty (250) high school girls, for whose release peoples across the globe have mobilized but to no avail till date.

Also worth noting are the recent developments that led to the temporary partition of Mali, even though the country is now struggling to ensure cohesion and national unity since the July 2013 elections. The security and institutional crisis that rocked the country in 2012, was related to the actions of a few small militant groups, mainly composed of foreigners. The objective of these groups was to undermine the foundations of Mali's unity by challenging the secular nature of the state, against the will of the majority of Malians, through widespread propagation in the country of radical Islamism, founded on sectarian and abusive interpretations of the Holy Koran.

In general – be it in the West or in Africa - the place and role of religion on the public scene are not that simple. Furthermore, the relationship between our modern societies and religions, whether endogenous or based on the BOOK, on one hand, and between their followers, on the other hand, is often complex.

Prejudices, resentments, misunderstandings abound on both sides. Yet at a closer look, beyond assumptions, one can indeed observe that there are under- and overpasses and points of convergence between the religions. These have been discovered thanks to the opened avenues for dialog, which have enabled different leaders and followers, with full respect for their respective identities, to speak face-to-face and get to know each other better, share their opinions, dispel misunderstandings and facilitate mutual understanding and the need to "live together" within the communities.

This is the objective and scope of interreligious dialog that have been encouraged over the centuries by generations of political and religious leaders from all continents. **The purpose of interreligious dialog is to establish trust between followers of different religions in order to get to know and learn from each other their respective differences, so as to gain a better insight into the common ground behind the differences and put such to use for the benefit of the society.**



Prayer Incentive for Peace, Rome
June 8th 2014

Beyond immediate and legitimate security responses against religious excesses, there is urgent need to take initiatives of a different nature that are rather geared at a lasting peace; which can only be achieved through systematization of sincere and organized Inter-religious dialog.

The African Initiative of Education on Peace and Development through Interreligious dialog, particularly between Muslims and Christians, is being launched against the background of the resurgence of religious extremism in Africa.

It is further built on the expected outcome of the symbolic meeting held on Sunday 8th June in Rome. Indeed, at the initiative of Pope Francis, the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud ABBAS and the Israeli President, Shimon PERES accepted the invitation to Rome to join the Holy Father in prayers for Peace.

This African initiative of education on peace and development through interreligious and intercultural dialog, is also predicated on the "Fiftieth Anniversary Manifesto" adopted in Cotonou at the International Symposium on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of African independence held from 16 - 20 November, 2010. This document states in its Resolution No. 29: "In this year 2010, proclaimed the "Year of Peace and Security" by the African Union, we will mobilize, the political and social forces, economic, intellectual powers, cultural and media role players, through a culture of dialog, and take all the necessary measures for the prevention, early warning, mediation and resolution of interethnic conflicts and political clashes. The priority is to put an end to the harmful and criminal explosion of the violation of rights and the repeated tragedies which, in paralyzing the continent's progress, seriously undermine our credibility." It should be noted that this Manifesto was adopted by the Summit of Heads of State of the African Union held in July 2011 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea.

The initiative was inspired by the preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO which declares that: "**Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed.**"

It is in furtherance of the hosting and conclusions of the International Symposium on Interreligious Dialog held in **Cotonou from 3 - 5 March 2014 under the chairmanship of Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, President** of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialog. This meeting focused on attitudes such as respect for the beliefs of others, rediscovery of one's spiritual identity, collective thinking on measures to be taken to ensure material and spiritual well-being of humankind based on factors encouraging interreligious dialog.

It comes also in furtherance of the hosting of the "**International Symposium on dialog between endogenous religions, Christianity and Islam in the service of Peace in Africa**" organized in Cotonou from **20 - 21 August 2007**, under the auspices of UNESCO. This meeting resulted in the issuance of twelve (12) action items called the **Cotonou Declaration**. It considers education, training, culture, natural, human and social sciences, and communication as major drives for genuine/sincere dialog between Christians, Muslims and believers of African endogenous religions.

OBJECTIVES

II.1 Overall Objective:

Overall, this initiative seeks to contribute towards the promotion of durable peace in Africa, primarily through interreligious and intercultural dialog, with Benin as a fulcrum (focal point).

This shall consist in building relationships of trust between followers of different religions for "better understanding and consolidation of knowledge acquired" from the respective differences with a view to reaching concerted actions for collective building of a peaceful and developed society.

II.2 Specific objectives:

The interreligious dialog initiative is aimed at promoting exchanges of life experiences between Christians and Muslims and followers of other religions.

More specifically, it seeks to:

- promote and undertake joint actions between followers of various religions;
- sensitize the youths of the continent, region by region, on issues and challenges pertaining to "living together" through interreligious and intercultural dialog;
- promote operational and consensual culture of secularism;
- promote mechanisms and preventive security measures involving public forces and citizens' social watchdog groups;
- advocate for strengthening of the "interreligious and intercultural dialog" component in peacekeeping operations led by the United Nations and other international and regional institutions.

STRATEGY

To achieve these objectives, the strategy will consist in:

1. promoting joint initiatives between Christians, Muslims and other religious followers on the basis of shared values;
2. holding regular information awareness sessions of leaders of different religious denominations to promote common values;
3. carrying out advocacy activities for targeted audiences geared at strengthening or inserting the "inter-religious and inter-cultural dialog" component into International Peacekeeping Operations (UN, NATO, EU, AU, ECOWAS, etc.)

PARTNERS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO BE INVOLVED

Championed by the Government of Benin thanks to its adoption by the Council of Ministers in July 2014, the Africa Initiative enjoys the support of UNDP, which since then has been trying to mobilize bilateral and international partners thereon. The United Nations General Assembly, at its Session of 15 December 2014, adopted two resolutions on the culture of peace. Notably: Resolutions A/ 69/L34 and A/69/L41, the former themed "Follow-up to the Durban Declaration and Program of Action for a Culture of Peace" and the latter themed "Promotion of Interreligious and Intercultural dialog, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace". Resolution A/69/L41 p.2, paragraph 11 explicitly refers to the African Initiative for education on peace through interreligious and intercultural dialog. UNESCO and UNAOC have agreed to sponsor and support the launching of the International Symposium on 26 May, 2015.

ECOWAS has expressed its interest and support for the program which is entirely in line with its concerns. The AU has likewise featured the theme among the priority items on its January 2015 Summit agenda.

The effective implementation of this program requires the active involvement of both direct and indirect stakeholders, notably:

- leaders of the various religious faiths: priests, pastors, imams, preachers and leaders of indigenous religions;
- political and administrative authorities at the local and national levels, including Heads of sub-regional and regional institutions;
- opinion leaders, stakeholders and civil society organizations, youths and women engaged in social justice activism;
- faithful practitioners and other believers;
- Lay people opened to interculturality, etc.

IMPLEMENTATION

V.1 Launching of the Initiative

A High-Level International Conference shall be held in Cotonou from 26 - 28 May 2015 to launch the initiative and identify the principal axes of the project at the level of the African continent.

V.2 Institutional anchoring and launching of the Project at the national level

The African Initiative Project shall be headquartered in Benin, the base for the establishment and promotion of an African initiative, bearer of new hope in the face of intransigent religious movements that are spreading around the globe.

Following the communication of the Council of Ministers adopting the program, interdepartmental orders were issued for establishment of the Steering Committee and the National Technical Review Committee. This program is a product of the successful collaboration between the Civil Society and the Government of Benin.

As a matter of fact, the Steering Committee, the supreme governing body of the program, shall be chaired by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, while CPPS the initiator of the project shall serve as rapporteur. This committee shall oversee the following activities:

- Establishment of structures for effective implementation of the initiative;
- planning of actions / activities, designing of scenarios and themes;
- launching of Project activities;
- organization of series of public lectures;
- establishment/ institution of frameworks for concerted actions or

- platforms for brainstorming;
- Information-Education-Communication (IEC) activities.

The Steering Committee shall give directions to the National Technical Review Committee composed of the various ministries involved in the implementation of the program and CPPS, which shall assume the functions of the Permanent Secretariat.

V.3 Activities at the national level

The activities to be undertaken at the national level are as follows:

- organize public lectures in national and international languages in areas with high concentrations of varied religious beliefs and where coexistence with other religions could be a problem;
- establish frameworks for regular consultations between religious leaders to promote interreligious and intercultural dialog; identify common values shared by these religions and encourage a culture of dialog whenever problems arise;
- create platforms for brainstorming among actors of the different religions to discuss common ideals and universally shared values of human rights;
- Host information-awareness sessions on national radio and television stations, including religious stations;
- produce papers and information bulletins devoted to interreligious dialog.
- Integrate an "Education for Peace" component in the curricula of schools and colleges to promote, at the grassroots, the concept of "living together" among youths.

V.4 Activities at regional and international levels

This project that is championed by Benin seeks to serve the cause of peace through activities aimed at strengthening the "coexistence" of the people at the regional and international levels. It shall undertake a critical analysis, at the sub-regional, African continental and international levels, of the different facets of religious extremism and propose approaches to the most original and effective solutions on a specific case-by-case basis.

Interreligious and intercultural dialog is now one of the possible remedies to the insurgency of extremists that have scarred the African continent and other parts of the globe. In the long run, the goal is to ensure that dialog is sought at the beginning and not the end of combats, a time when the wounds are difficult to heal and have taken their toll before this know-how (dialog) becomes a reflex among all Africans within the UEMOA,

CEMAC, ECOWAS, ECCAS and the AU; which will help to greatly reduce the hotspots of tension across this continent.



V.5 “Inter-religious and Inter-cultural dialog” as a UN peacekeeping operations component

One of the priorities of this program shall be to strive at the international level to ensure systematic integration of the “interreligious and intercultural dialog”

component into the UN peacekeeping strategies. The creation of a corps of African Knights for Peace, alongside the UN peacekeepers (Blue Helmets), could be considered to initiate and promote dialog

wherever necessary, as an early warning or preventive measure or otherwise, in places where arms have already been rumbling and wreaking havoc.

Promising interreligious dialog initiatives exist and continue to thrive elsewhere. Such initiatives should be revisited, emulated and adapted to the context and realities of the African continent. This component shall essentially consist in:

- organizing study tours in countries with a rich experience of inter-religious dialog;
- undertaking studies for promotion of interreligious and intercultural dialog within UEMOA, ECOWAS, CEMAC, ECCAS and the AU;
- organizing annual international meetings on specific topics related to inter-religious dialog and subsequent to previously conducted studies relating to peace education in Africa;
- proposing and initiating by anticipation, at the level of ECOWAS and ECCAS, dialog in disaster-prone African states;
- establishing consultation frameworks to promote interreligious dialog in Africa;
- participating in international meetings on interreligious dialog;
- creating a website (English, French, Arabic and if possible Hausa, Yoruba, Swahili, etc.) to promote inter-religious dialog;
- engaging in preparedness actions with the United Nations Peace-keeping Operations Department, the AU and with other relevant international fora.

SOME SPECIFICITIES OF THE AFRICAN INITIATIVE

Initiatives on interreligious and intercultural dialog for peace continue to emerge, with more or less success. But the African Initiative, as proposed by the Government of Benin, draws its originality from a combination of several key factors: recognition of endogenous religions, secularism in action, Gender ("women") issue at the heart of this dialog, the symbolic date of 26 May 2014 and the Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Encounter.

VI.1 Recognition of endogenous religions and spiritualities

Prominently among the innovations of this INITIATIVE, is the involvement of religions which have so far been ignored in all "dialog" efforts – on Endogenous Religions and Cultures -, while taking cognizance of the wealth and values to be discovered and put into action. In Africa, they form an important part of society. This project, in terms of culture of peace at the level of the United Nations and even the AU, is one of the few initiatives that has credibly taken cognizance of this particular dimension.



Berlin : "House of the Unique"
« House of prayer and education »
To open in 2018 :

In any meaningful approach geared towards achieving lasting peace in Africa, the involvement of endogenous religions cannot be precluded due their effective and increasing influence on conscientiousness.

In Benin, for example, followers of indigenous religions have maintained very good relations with the Christian missionaries and peacefully hosted Muslim communities of all backgrounds. And this relationship prevails; whereby the need for their involvement to ensure a fruitful inter-religious dialog, especially in the light of their faith in a supreme God and acknowledgement of Abraham as the, "Father of all Believers".

There is equally need to consider the inbound "wind" originating several thousand years back from the East, which has endowed our lands with germs of beneficial mix of patient tenacity and invigorating spirituality. The number of African Buddhist or Soka Gakkai circles are inconspicuously, discreetly and surprisingly emerging. Likewise the circles of philosophers who regulate of the thought and social behavior.

VI. 2 Secularism in action

Although many countries have made provision in their respective constitutions to frame the concept of secularism, in practice and in everyday life, the issue virtually pops up from time to time. What should it concretely entail, to what extent can religions coexist without posing a problem within the community? The Cotonou symposium shall candidly and dispassionately examine this issue with specialists and come forth with relevant recommendations. The consequent implementation of the recommendations thereon shall enhance genuine cohesion between the religions, debarring supremacy of one religion over the others.

VI. 3 Gender ("women") Issue at the heart of interreligious and intercultural dialog

It is obvious today that all religions have issues regarding gender mainstreaming in ecclesial service functions or worshipping together. It is also easy to see that the primary victims, hostages of the terror of religious war happen to be women. Yet again women are indisputably the model/embodyment of "togetherness" in our societies. The strategic focus of the symposium shall not, as is customary, preclude this dimension. One of the main themes of this international meeting will focus on the issue of *"Women at the heart of interreligious dialog with due regard to cultural diversity"*



VI.4 Exceptional Feature

The date of hosting of the Cotonou symposium is symbolic as it recalls a memorable event. It is indeed on that faithful day of 26 May 2014 that Mahmoud ABBAS and Shimon PERES accepted the invitation issued in

Bethlehem by Pope Francis to join him in Rome to pray for a genuine and lasting peace. This event, which became a reality on 8 June 2014, the day of Pentecost, led Peres to return to Rome to press the Pope for support towards the establishment of a "UN of religions"!

On 26 May 2015, one year after the invitation issued in Bethlehem and bearing in mind the series of massacres that have marred our planet, the Symposium convened in Benin shall be launched in commitment to public safeguard, i.e. not to shield any aspect of the evil/scourge that is "spreading terror" and gnawing at humanity. Precisely why due attention and reflection must be given to the recently expressed call to order which aptly shades a light on the African initiative from "another perspective":

"If the jihadist violence triggers immediate security response, it is clear that such response would be inadequate to quell terrorism in the long term. If the current crises and wars in the Middle East are not resolved, the problem of Islamist violence in the West will not be resolved. Basically, the problems of Muslim countries have taken a "trans-Islamic" dimension. A dimension that requires **genuine solutions**." (FarhadKhosrokhavar, *Radicalisation*, Ed. de la Maison des sciences humaines, Paris 2014) *¹.



Opening of Discussions on interreligious dialogue :
Cotonou, 3 March 2014

*¹: "If the Jihadist threat leads immediately to security response, it is obvious that such response is inappropriate to combat terrorism. Without addressing the current crises and wars in the Middle East, the issue of Islamist violence in the West cannot be addressed. In fact, Muslim countries' problems have taken a "trans-Islamic" dimension. A dimension that requires "**true solutions**".(FarhadKhosrokhavar, *Radicalisation*, Ed. de la Maison des sciences humaines, Paris 2014) "



“Mediation and forgiveness are tools for collaboration and dialogue” :
Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser ,
The High Representative for the
United Nations Alliance of
Civilizations (UNAOC)

VI.5 Involvement of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC)

Taking into consideration the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations’ areas of action and mandate – that is to **promote greater understanding and respect among civilizations, cultures and religions and work through a number of practical projects in the areas of Youth, Education, Media and Migrations**; legitimated by the General Assembly with Resolution 64/14. The Alliance will also contribute to the Pan-African Centre

for Social Prospects ‘efforts to :

- Promote and undertake joint actions between followers of various religions with the reinforcement of interreligious dialog;
- Sensitize the youths of the continent, region by region, on issues and challenges pertaining to “living together” through interreligious and intercultural dialog. This effort can be secured by already existing UNAOC activities, which encapsulate various fields of action such as youth-entrepreneurship (Entrepreneurs for Social Change, Youth Solidarity Fund); youth – intercultural and interreligious dialog (PLURAL+, PeaceApp, Summer School);
- Advocate for strengthening of the “interreligious and intercultural dialog” with the contribution of the Alliance Council of Religious and Political Leaders.

Taking into consideration its area of actions, the Alliance of Civilizations reiterates its disposition to focus on youth – oriented matters for the symposium in particular:

- **UNAOC’s Summer School (www.unaocsummerschool.org)** which brings together youth from around the world to address pressing global challenges within the context of cultural and religious density. Over the course of one week, a group of 75 – 100 participants aged 18-35 live together and participate in workshops and roundtables focused on understanding and fostering global citizenship, reducing stereotypes, promoting intercultural harmony and building alliances through the use of concrete tools.
- **Youth Solidarity Fund (www.unaocyouth.org/ysf)** which provides seed funding to outstanding youth-led initiatives that promote long term constructive relationships among people from diverse cultural and religious background to promote more peaceful societies. The fund, established in 2008, links small scale and local work to larger movements for social and global change.

VI. 6 It is assuredly time for a Manifesto, an essential compass

One of the peculiarities of the international symposium in May 2015 in Cotonou is the Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Encounter which shall chart the course of its proceedings.

This text shall address the danger propelled by "the hell-bent barbaric invasion of the state of mind". It will focus on education for tolerance, dialog and convergence hinged on the preamble of the Constitution of UNESCO. Product of the discussion and consensus among all the participants at this meeting, the **Manifesto** shall provide education sector stakeholders and decision-makers with a compass for methodical, effective and practical introduction of Education for Peace in schools, high schools, colleges and all kinds of training centers. It will also serve as a tool to initiate studies for the promotion of peace in Africa among the youths, who are the lead actors of religious and political conflicts on the continent.

Launch advocacy activities to engage the support of sub-regional organizations such as ECOWAS & ECCAS and regional organizations such as the AU, in order to ensure that the Manifesto that would result from the symposium is adopted and serves as a reference instrument for the promotion of education for peace.

Pope Francis, sensing the urgency for such educational activity, specifically instructed that all seminaries in Africa preparing candidates for priesthood should provide sound training in interreligious dialog.

The Abu Dhabi Declaration against violence perpetrated by religious extremism and in favor of shared progress in development gained widespread international attention. The meeting organized by "Religions for Peace" under the auspices of the "Forum for Peace" in Muslim societies, which was concluded on 13 December 2014, portrays the urgent need for such an approach.

It should be recalled that this Declaration was an appeal to young Muslims to fight against terrorism in order to avoid lapsing into a state of chaos and undermining Islam.

"We can legitimately get rid of Boko Haram in Nigeria, overcome the horrors of the misguided Al Qaeda in the Middle East, surmount the bloody adventures of the Shebab, seletas and anti balakas in Somalia and Central Africa without ever having to discredit Abraham, insult Muhammad and re-crucify Jesus Christ. This could be purely and simply achieved through education for discernment and respect for the underlying values of the Alliance of Civilizations". *2

Brother Melchior, sma

DURATION AND IMPACT OF THE INITIATIVE

There is need to set up a structure that would monitor the implementation of the recommendations of the symposium. Proposals for such a structure should be based on its effectiveness at the national, regional and international levels. The structure shall take into consideration the experience and support of credible institutions, the cogent actions of human rights organisations, as well as the intuition and commitment of the Government of Benin and promoters of the Cotonou meeting.

At the outset, the Initiative shall be effective for a period of three (3) years to initiate and help consolidate the notion of "living together", social cohesion for a lasting peace in Africa which is the sole guarantee for the growth and integral development of its citizens.

**2 This is the genuine response to the rippling reactions that recently rocked the world, as reprisal for what was considered an unacceptable provocation. The magnitude of one of such reactions that took place on 17 January 2015 in Niamey, shocked international opinion: churches, hotels, orphanages, Christian schools were looted and burned...!*

Over time, this program shall bring African countries to privilege interreligious and intercultural dialog over fratricidal wars that are tributary to the rapid decline of the continent. An appraisal shall be conducted at the end of this first stage. This will help to determine the road map for the furtherance of the initiative.

FUNDING OF THE INITIATIVE

The Government of Benin, promoter of the project, through a resolution adopted by the Council of Ministers (on 10 November 2014) has pledged to provide core funding.

A call for contributions shall be organized to collect contributions from other governments, regional and international institutions and any other relevant sources. Coordination between the Government of Benin, UNDP, UNAOC and other structures shall facilitate all administrative and management procedures.



In the UNDP office in Cotonou, on 31 July 2014 ,
Mrs Odile Sorgho-Moulinier marks the first international support to the
decision of Benin to promote « the African Education Initiative for Peace via
the inter-religious Dialogue »

PERMANENT SECRETARIAT

Under the supervision of the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research of the Republic of Benin, the Project's Permanent Secretariat shall be coordinated by the CPPS, BP 1501 Porto-Novo (Benin), Tel: (229) 20 22 44 26; Email: cpps.iat@gmail.com

PROGRAM OF THE SYMPOSIUM

Palais des Congrès, Cotonou, 26-28 May 2015

This meeting designed to launch the "African Initiative on Education for Peace and Development through Inter-religious and Inter-cultural Dialog shall bring together two hundred (200) participants, among which fifty (50) foreign participants. These participants shall be selected from diverse cultural backgrounds, according to their religions, their experiences and their devout commitment to peace. Every participant shall make an input for the furtherance of peace in Africa. Such contribution shall feature in a select panel of discussions held in plenary session where everyone can express his views.

For a better insight into the issue of peace in Africa through interreligious and intercultural dialog, it is important from the outset that all participants, regardless of their religious and cultural affiliations, should be put on the same footing in terms of its scope and the stakes involved.

To this end, two (2) introductory papers shall be presented at the opening of the plenary debates, to enable all participants to agree on a number of prerequisites before splitting into panels of discussions.

The first introductory paper shall be themed: **"Interreligious and Intercultural Dialog: Necessity, Concept and Scope"**.

The second introductory paper to be also delivered in plenary session shall give a situational analysis of the issue in question with a view to identifying the strengths and weaknesses in a bid to give participants an insight into the issue within the African context. This second paper shall be titled: **"Interreligious and Intercultural Dialog and the Issue of Integration of the Peoples and Unity in Africa: State of Play."**

The plenary sessions shall also showcase significant testimonies either on memorable cases of situations of suffering, or "success stories" directly related to the interreligious and intercultural dialog. These testimonies that shall be delivered by prominent personalities devoutly committed to peace, are intended to persuade the participants and international opinion of the need and urgency to systematize and institutionalize interreligious and intercultural dialog at all levels.

During this meeting scheduled to last for three (3) days, the proceedings shall be facilitated by three (3) panels :

Panel 1: Interreligious Dialog;

Panel 2: Intercultural Dialog;

Panel 3: At the Crossroads of Religion / Culture.

This distinction between the three (3) panels will help participants to avoid some common and frequent hotchpotch of ideas and forge ahead with the debates, according to their profiles, their interests and their experiences. This thematic separation shall enable the participants to debate under best possible conditions, thus permitting them to clearly and concretely identify for themselves the different types of challenges facing Africa, in a bid to consolidate peace for sustainable development.

These three (3) panels will afford them the opportunity to address a number of specific sub-themes.

Panel 1, "Interreligious Dialog", shall address the following concerns:

1. The role of education in promoting universal values shared by religions: what lessons for today and tomorrow?
2. Convergence efforts and initiatives between religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism ...).
3. The spiritual dimension of interreligious dialog: taking into account endogenous religions and various spiritualities (Buddhism, Eckankar ...).
4. The State, secularism and peaceful coexistence of religions.

Panel 2, "Intercultural Dialog", shall cover the following sub-themes:

1. The political dimension of interreligious and intercultural dialog:
The duty of truth.
2. The coexistence of peoples and cultures in Africa: large and minority groupings;
3. Intercultural dialog as a tool for peace and a factor of development in Africa;

4. **"Convergence Culture"** and its implications for peace education in Africa.

Panel 3, "At the Carrefour of Religion/Culture" shall address the following concerns:

1. Women at the heart of interreligious dialog, with full respect for cultural diversity;
2. The role of the Media in promoting and strengthening interreligious and intercultural dialog;
3. **Safety Watch-keeping:** Interreligious and intercultural dialog as a tool for prevention of abuses and the issue of information sharing and management;
4. The place of interreligious and intercultural dialog in peacekeeping operations in Africa: Towards setting-up a corps of (African) Knights of Peace.

In addition to these specific tasks, the three (3) panels shall perform common tasks to be harmonized and adopted in plenary. These common tasks include:

1. Reading and amending of the draft Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Encounter for concerted actions;
2. Reading and adopting of the draft Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Convergence for concerted actions;
3. Reading and adopting of recommendations for follow-up on the symposium (strategic directions and proposed activities for the next 3 years);
4. Reading and adopting of the synthesis report of the symposium.

These themes and sub-themes of the symposium scheduled for the three (3) days, shall be featured as follows in the agenda spanning from 26 to 28 May, 2015.

AGENDA OF THE SYMPOSIUM

DAY ONE : May 26, 2015		
DISCUSSANTS	HOURS	ACTIVITIES
A. OPENING SESSION		
	8:00 am - 9:00 am	Arrival and ushering-in of participants
	9:00 am - 9:30 am	Arrival and ushering-in of officials
	9:30 am -10:00 am	Opening ceremony: 1. Welcome Address by the Steering Committee 2. Various support messages 3. Official Opening Speech by the Head of State
	10:00 am -10h30 am	Cocktail and departure of officials
	10:30 am -10H45 am	Election of the Presidium (1 Chairman, 1 Secretary and 2 Rapporteurs)
B. 1st PLENARY SESSION		
	10:45 am - 12:15 noon	1. Interreligious and intercultural dialog: Necessity, Concept and Scope 2. Interreligious and intercultural dialog and the issue of integration of peoples and unity in Africa: State of play 3. Exchanges
	12:15 noon - 1:00 pm	Testimonies <i>Situations of suffering experienced and success stories registered during interreligious or intercultural dialogs in various religious and cultural arenas.</i>
	1:00 pm – 3:00 pm	Lunch Break
C. PANELS		
	3:00 pm - 4:30 pm 5:00 - 6:30 pm (Simultaneous working sessions of the three panels)	Panel 1: Interreligious Dialog 1. The role of education in promoting universal values shared by religions: what lessons for today and tomorrow? 2. Convergence efforts and initiatives between religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism ...) 3. The spiritual dimension of interreligious dialog: taking into account endogenous religions and other spiritualities (Buddhism, Eckankar ..). 4. Group discussions and works (what are the recommendations to be formulated?).
		Panel 2: Intercultural Dialog 1. The political dimension of interreligious and intercultural dialog: The duty of truth. 2. The coexistence of peoples and cultures in Africa: From large to minority groupings. 3. Intercultural dialog as a tool for peace and a factor of development in Africa. 4. Group discussions and works (what are the recommendations to be formulated?).
		Panel 3 At the Crossroads of Religion / Culture 1. Women at the heart of interreligious dialog, with full respect for cultural diversity. 2. The role of the Media in promoting and strengthening interreligious and intercultural dialog. 3. Safety Watch-keeping: Interreligious and intercultural dialog as a tool for prevention of abuses and information sharing and monitoring. 4. Group discussions and works (what are the recommendations to be formulated?).
	4:30 pm - 5.00 pm	Coffee Break
	6:30 pm	End of the day's work

DAY TWO: May 27, 2015	
D- PLENARY	
8:30 am -10:00 am	Feedback from the working groups (recommendations issued) by the 3 panels
10:00 am -10:30 am	Coffee Break
E - PANELS (WORKING SESSIONS CONTINUED 1)	
10:30 am -1:00 pm (Simultaneous working sessions of the three panels)	Panel 1: Interreligious Dialog
	1. State, secularism and peaceful coexistence of religions
	2. Group discussions and works (recommendations issued).
	3. Reading and amendment of the "Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Encounters for common actions"
	Panel 2: Intercultural Dialog
	1. "Culture of Convergence" and its implications for peace education in Africa.
	2. Group discussions and works (what are the recommendations to be formulated?).
	3. Reading and amendment of the "Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Encounters for common actions".
	Panel 3: At the Crossroads of Religion / Culture
1. The place of interreligious and intercultural dialog in peacekeeping operations in Africa: Towards setting-up a corps of African Knights for Peace.	
2. Group discussions and works (recommendations issued).	
3. Reading and amendment of the "Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Encounters for common actions".	
1:00 pm - 3:00 pm	Break –Lunch
F. PLENARY	
3:00 pm - 4:30 pm	1. Feedback from the working groups (recommendations issued) by the 3 panels. 2. Discussions on the project relating to the "Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Encounters for common actions".
4:30 pm - 5:00 pm	Coffee Break
G. PANELS (Cont'd 2)	
5:00 pm – 6:30 pm (Simultaneous working sessions of the three panels)	Recommendations for follow-up of the symposium (strategic directions, management and proposed activities for the next 3 years);
6:30 pm	End of the day's work
8:00 pm – 10:30 pm	Interactive evening chat
DAY THREE: May 28, 2015	
H – PLENARY	
8:30 am -10:30 am	1. Restitution of the proceedings of the three panels on the follow-up action of the symposium (strategic directions, management and proposed activities for the next 3 years). 2. Setting-up of the Monitoring Committee 3. Discussions
10:30 am -11:00 am	Coffee break
J- CLOSING SESSION	
11:00 am -1:00 pm	1. Reading and adoption of the Manifesto for Tolerance, Dialog and Encounters for common actions. 2. Reading and adoption of the synthesis report of the symposium. 3. Setting-up of the Monitoring Committee 4. Closing ceremony: - Vote of thanks by the Steering Committee. - Closing remarks by the Head of State.
1:00 pm -3:00 pm	Lunch Break
3:00 pm	End of the Symposium

WE ARE WARNED!

Threats of large scale tragedies in Cameroon, Chad, Niger

“Your alliance will lead nowhere! Pick up all your weapons and fight us: you are welcome...”

: « You are sending 7,000 soldiers? Only 7,000? By Allah it's too few! We will capture them one by one”

“We shall fight the whole world, applying the principle according to which anyone who disobeys Allah or the prophet shall surrender, die or be enslaved”

(AbubakarShekau- Boko-Haram . Quoted by RFI -10 February 2015)

They will tell us that these statements and blusters are the fruits of furiously disturbed spirits. The reality, unfortunately! – is killings, mutilations, abductions, ... it is collective massacres, savage and mass destructions targeting innocent Christians, animists or Muslims, women hostages, children or old people, agnostic Aryans or Japanese Buddhists. Such is the tragedy universally experienced in this heavily cloudy century.

If we agree this is the work of disturbed spirits, that is where the true remedy should lie.

SO, WE NEED: PEACE THROUGH ANOTHER WAY

« In order to prevent and durably address these deadly conflicts expanding in Africa, some of which are perniciously similar to religious fundamentalism, each country and the regional communities, AU and UN and all other institutions should henceforth systematically mainstream in their processes the absolute need to complement their security measures with a vigorous policy to durably conquer peace with the arms of “willingness to live together” through a permanent interreligious and intercultural dialog. This would result in common achievements for social development and active solidarity. We also need to accept to give a chance to a ray of truth professed by all believers: « The praying nation commands God's mercy ».

Highlights from the High-Level Debate on building a Culture of Peace and Non-Violence organized by UNESCO on the occasion of 2012 International Peace Day at the United Nations Headquarters,



Ban Ki Moon
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“We cannot let the voices of extremists dominate the debate and inflame tensions. We need voices of moderation and solidarity, reason and respect – especially from religious and political leaders. More than ever peace requires dialogue across societies, greater sharing among cultures and better communication with others. I urge this Assembly to combat misunderstandings by promoting common understanding based on the values of the United Nations.”

Ban Ki-moon

Secretary-General of the United Nations



Irina Bokova
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“UNESCO’s message is clear. Peace cannot be decreed through treaties – it must be nurtured through the dignity, rights and capacities of every man and woman. It is a way of being, a way of interacting with others, a way of living on this planet... We must adapt to a new environment. The roots of violence today lie less between States and more within them. In ever more diverse societies, passive coexistence is not enough. We need stronger public policies and dialogue to make diversity a positive force for respect and creativity. We need new skills, new forms of what I call ‘cultural literacy.’

Irina Bokova

Director-General of UNESCO



Wole Soyinka
© Glen Cratty

“There must be dialogue of frank, mature minds. Instant, comprehensive solutions do not exist, only the arduous, painstaking path of dialogue, whose multi-textured demands are not beyond the innovative, as opposed to the emotive capacity, of cultured societies. So let that moving feast of regional dialogues – which was inaugurated by former President Khatami of Iran in these very chambers – be reinforced, emboldened, and even-handed. The destination should be a moratorium, but for this to be strong and enduring, it must be voluntary, based on a will to understanding and mental re-orientation, not on menace, self-righteous indictments and destructive emotionalism.”

Wole Soyinka

Nobel Laureate for Literature in 1986, member of the UNESCO High Panel on Peace and Dialogue among Cultures, is among contemporary Africa’s greatest writers. A Nigerian playwright, poet, novelist, and essayist. He has held several university positions and still lectures extensively