

FORUM INTRODUCTION

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This is a very unique moment for all of us. Not just to be here today and in each other's company, but to know that, if we so decide, this Forum will NOT be the last of its kind..., on the contrary, it may and it should be the first of a long series of Cordoba Forums that could lead the name of the city of CORDOBA to be written on the world map in blaring letters as THE symbol of CONVIVENCE, which is much more than tolerance. As written by Christoffer H. Grundmann in his book "Beyond Holy wars":

"The term *convivencia* –initially rendered into English as «living togetherness– was first used in 1948 by historian Américo Castro (1885-1972) as a descriptor of the everyday living and working togetherness of Jews, Christians and Muslims in medieval Spain. *Convivencia* does not just describe a situation; rather, it is seen as the outcome of a conscious effort toward successful management of living togetherness in a culturally diverse environment, because *convivencia* is the "*acción de convivir*". Today convivence has become an accepted neologism in English, owing its present popularity to the late Brazilian educator and theorist Paulo Freire (1921-1997). Freire emphasized that unconditional *convivencia* of people in power with the oppressed, powerless masses is necessary to establish genuine mutual trust. Only such a situation allows detecting what is borne communally, so that unbearable situations might be effectively opened for transforming actions. Convivence thus understood stands for unconditional, unprejudiced living togetherness in a non-hierarchical, non-stratified community." (End of quote)

(I also draw your attention on the excellent booklet "Convivencia and its French and English equivalents", produced by Dominique-D Arbell- in three languages on the origins of the word "convivence", a booklet which participants will find in their documentation.)

But enough of definitions: the future will depend on our actions, on what we all here make of this first Forum and, at the end of it, on our common decision about what should be the next one (IF there is to be a "next one") and the next, since the concept of this Forum is to bring, repeatedly and regularly, possibly every second year, in the same place, the same kind of people around the same subject: the practice of convivence or the art of "Living Together in Peace", as was unanimously proclaimed by the UN.

I speak of "the practice" or "the art" of convivence because we are not here to pass resolutions or to negotiate written recommendations. We are here to exchange great stories of positive examples of "convivence-making", to learn from each other's experiences, to share a diapraxis

of concrete cases, so that each of us goes back home richer and better equipped by our exchanges with other.

When I speak of the “same kind of people” and I look at this room, I see people with a very varied background, representing small or big or medium size entities which have all kind of different and specific objectives, people who are basically the same kind of human beings, who have been invited –and have accepted– to attend because, whatever they do back home, they have one thing in common: each, in his or her own way, contributes to a world of greater convivence, of better “Living Together in Peace”. From that particular point of view, they are what Anglophones call “like-minded” and their presence gives us reasons to hope when we think of Shakespeare’s line: “Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments” Shakespeare pursues his poem saying: “love is not love which alters when it alteration finds.” But his starting line makes me rather think that we have here a gathering of people whose common denominator is that they have no hate in their hearts. And I cannot but think of Nelson Mandela in April 1975, 44 years almost to the day, on the occasion of my sixth private visit to him as ICRC Delegate General for Africa, in his cell on Robben Island. As I was expressing my admiration –indeed, my wonder– at his absence of hate for his oppressors, the already Great Man but still a prisoner shot out: “Never hate! Hate only harms him who hates”. What a lesson from the darkness of his cell! What a lesson for his future «Rainbow Country»! What a lesson for humanity! What a superb guideline for this Forum... which, I confess, is in fact born out of this illuminating instant.

We are here to create a lasting “Spirit of Cordoba”, inspired by the myth of al-Andalus and by the example of Nelson Mandela, a constructive spirit of mutual tolerance, of reciprocal convivence, a will to build on positive examples that do not ignore difficulties, but transcends them and turn them into opportunities; and if we manage to repeat that feat every second year, in ten years’ time, when many of us (and certainly myself) will no longer be in Cordoba to see the tree that grew from the seeds we had planted, people will say: “They made a difference”.

In the three days to come you will not need to agree, neither will you really need to convince...but you will need to SHARE. Share your experiences, tell your own story or that of your organization, share your failures perhaps but mainly your successes. For we are here to listen to –and learn from– each other. Each of you has a story (personal or institutional) that can be inspiring for others and the balance of the Forum will not be drawn when it ends but when all of you will be back home, loaded with lessons learnt and examples to be followed while in Cordoba, but to be applied and implemented in your own specific field of activities. THAT is the very concrete side of the “Spirit of Cordoba”:

“Let me not to the marriage of true minds admit impediments”.

You must all be “true minds” and your words will find and touch a sister soul and plant in it seeds that will grow in her own field... a world away from you.

I wish us all a happy, smiling and successful Cordoba Forum. As Ghislaine Alajouanine, whom you will hear tomorrow morning and who has written a “Plea for convivence”, which is a little jewel, would say: “It is all a matter of enthusiasm!”

So, I say: “Enthousiasmez-vous!” It is a message that goes back before al-Andalus: to the Greek gods! And remember that enthusiasm is contagious. Which is why this Forum will give a large place to Youth, for Youth keeps that quality which we tend to lose with age: enthusiasm. This should be the fuel of our Forum... and of the next ones hopefully!