

CULTURES, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATIONS

***From communities to international organizations:
parliamentarians and the challenge of cultural policies***

Summary of the conferences and discussions on Saturday, September 20, 1997

Chair: **Mr. Yldefonso Finol**

Member of the Legislative Assembly of Zulia

Vice-chair: **Mr. Léandre Dion**

Member of the National Assembly of Québec

Speakers: **Madam Margaret F. Delisle**

Member of the National Assembly of Québec

Madam Laura Pavón Jaramillo

Secretary of the Committee on Culture of the Senate of Mexico

Mr. Ramón Francisco Giménez

Chairman of the Committee on Culture of the Chamber of Deputies of the
Nation of the Republic of Argentina

Secretary: **Madam Nancy Ford**

National Assembly of Québec

Madam Margaret F. Delisle is a Member of the National Assembly of Québec. She was a municipal councillor for the City of Sillery from 1982 to 1985, and then Mayor from 1985 to 1994. Within the Communauté urbaine de Québec, she was President of the Grand Conseil, from 1986 to 1987, and Vice-President of the Executive Committee, from 1991 to 1994. From 1992 to 1993, she was president of the Canadian Federation of Municipalities. Since November 1994, she has been the Official Opposition Critic in the areas of Municipal Affairs and matters relating to the National Capital.

Madam Delisle dealt with cultural policies and priorities of Québec during her presentation. Firstly, she gave a general overview of the cultural policy adopted by the Government of Québec in 1992, a policy which covers all facets of culture and which was developed in a spirit of openness.

Three issues arise out of this cultural policy: a collective issue relating to the affirmation of cultural identity; a second relating to support for creativity and the arts, and finally, an issue concerning the needs of citizens in terms of access to and participation in cultural life. These are the main concerns in Québec society relating to its culture.

In implementing this cultural policy, two independent organizations took charge of supporting the arts and the cultural industries: the *Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec* and the *Société de développement des entreprises culturelles*.

The current priorities for action remain the diversification of sources of financing and cultural democratization. Hence, over the past few years, various fiscal measures have been adopted in the form of income tax credits and exemptions. More recently, a *Fonds de la culture et des communications* has been created to support the development of new content for the information highways and multimedia. The government's efforts are also being concentrated on broadening the dissemination of the arts and of culture to all sectors of the population and within all regions of Québec.

Secondly, Madam Delisle raised the theme of including the cultural exemption in trade agreements, the objective of which is to allow the free circulation and universal broadcasting of culture, as well as to create favorable conditions for diversity and cultural pluralism.

In conclusion, Madam Delisle pointed out that pluralism in the area of culture depends on a broad and open exposure to creation in all languages and in all its forms. However, this must not prevent realism and openness to dialogue. In her view, interparliamentary cooperation in this regard constitutes an instrument that would make it possible to create new equilibria in the discussions.

Madam Laura Pavón Jaramillo is Secretary of the Committee on Culture of the Senate of Mexico. She has been a member of the Institutional Revolutionary Party since 1963 and has held positions including Secretary General of the Council for the Integration of Women. She was successively a local Deputy of the Congress of the State of Mexico, Mayor of Toluca and federal Deputy of the

53rd and 55th Legislatures. During the latter, she chaired the Administration Committee of the Chamber of Deputies. For the 56th Legislature, she is a Senator of the State of Mexico and Chairs the Commission for the Protection of Children's Rights.

Madam Pavón Jaramillo essentially dealt with the problem of the preservation of the cultural heritage of the indigenous populations of the Americas, in the context of economic globalization.

The large-scale trade negotiations and economic globalization which are marking the end of the century do not occur without generating serious conflicts and problems. The accelerated formation of economic blocks carries the threat of new types of protectionism.

There exists a tendency to resituate Man and his needs at the centre of the concept of development. In this context, the demands of peoples that have been integrated in various ways, through various mechanisms of domination in one territorial, political or cultural unit, are becoming more comprehensible. However, the economic integration process at the global level has left aside cultural demands, in some cases giving rise to movements of extreme nationalism. Given the risk inherent in the fragmentation of States, which threatens the integration project and causes perplexity on the part of the population, sovereignty, national unity and territorial integrity must be reaffirmed. However, this statement must not point to the conclusion of a monolithic idea of national culture, but rather to a conception based on the recognition of cultural plurality, the respect of individual liberties and the strengthening of political democracy, with acceptance of the fact that development is not only an economic project, but also indeed a cultural project.

Hence, the constitutional reform of 1992 recognized, in the fundamental law of the Republic of Mexico, the multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of the national identity of the Mexican people, whose origins lie precisely in the diversity of the indigenous peoples. In this way, harmony within diversity is favoured, thus reaffirming respect and tolerance without any distinction of superiority among the diverse origins of the population.

Notwithstanding the importance, in cultural terms, placed on the indigenous peoples, the latter are in

fact in a position of inequality on the economic and social levels. Society must therefore be sensitized to the poverty of the indigenous peoples. The principles that should guide us with regard to the issues relating to these peoples are the following: pluralism, integrity, participation and free choice. Particular attention should be placed on the status of women and young indigenous people, among whom marginalization and exploitation are often accentuated. Also, the agrarian demands of the indigenous peoples must be taken into account, since one of the fundamental elements of the Indian identity in the Americas is land-based.

In conclusion, the efforts of the governments in general, and in particular of the legislators, must promote the participation of groups of citizens in the design of policies and programs in the area of culture, so that these may be favorable toward the indigenous peoples.

Mr. Ramón Francisco Giménez is Chairman of the Committee on Culture of the Chamber of Deputies of the Nation of the Republic of Argentina. He is a professor of philosophy and of education sciences. Among his political experiences, he was Assistant Secretary of Education, Minister of Culture and Education, Deputy of the Nation, Provincial Deputy, Rector and Founder of the Formosa National University, and Minister of the Interior. As a Deputy, he is a member of the Committees on Education, Science and Technology, General Legislation and National Defence.

Mr. Ramón Francisco Giménez centred his presentation on the cultural experience in Argentina, and more particularly in the Province of Formosa, where many ethnic groups contribute to the cultural identity and history of this people. Argentine cultural identity is defined, expressed and reinforced by the reaffirmation of the cultural identity of each region. In order for growth to occur, it is fundamental for the people to know about their origins and respect their cultural identities.

In the Province of Formosa, with the advent of democracy beginning in 1983, a large place was reserved for the social and cultural development of the indigenous groups which, until then, been excluded from the process of national and regional development. By granting these communities the status of persons under public law, the State enhanced their social integration and at the same time the improvement of their economic conditions, which improves their participation in national and

regional development.

National identity and its recognition are essential to developing good legislation in the cultural area.

Each people has its own values and customs: therein lies its identity. Legislators have the duty to formulate the standards that reflect the manifestations, spheres of interest and facets that make up the emergent and existing cultural heritage. Moreover, it is also important to define the role of the private sector in the world of culture, to open inter-American channels of exchange under the rules of free circulation of cultural goods and human resources.

It is essential to deal with the concept of the “culture of tolerance” in the building of the Americas. Parliamentarians must legislate so as to preserve cultures, for their enrichment and their integration in the respect of diversity, so that this grouping of culture may give a distinctive character to the Americas.

Finally, Mr. Giménez mentioned that it is the duty of the peoples of the Americas to listen to the indigenous peoples, who demand the recognition of the inalienable right to ownership of their lands, upon which depend their aspirations and their identity.

SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

In the course of the discussion that arose following the presentations by the guest speakers, many participants expressed the need to interact culturally in order to preserve the cultural identity and underlined the role of parliamentarians in this process. The experiences cited included that of Mexico, in relation to the problem of the large number of ethnic groups speaking various languages and dialects, and the reform undertaken to make the law of the State compatible with indigenous rights.

Another theme that was often raised was that of the symbiosis in the indissoluble bonds between the land and the culture of the Indian peoples. In this context, it is essential to consider what will happen to the cultural diversity in the future, when the continent will be subject to integration and

globalization on an economic level. The respect of the diversity of small communities is vital in a world in which linguistic marginalization is an aspect of economic marginalization.

One of the main difficulties in a world of homogenization is the preservation of the less-used languages. However, the efforts to preserve the national languages and cultures must be made while respecting the customs and traditions of the indigenous peoples, and the preservation of the territorial integrity of these peoples must be exercised while respecting the diversity of the small communities. Education is the channel that makes it possible to transmit these ideas and to survive. Indeed, this is the most appropriate means for encouraging the respect of multiculturalism.

In conclusion, at the suggestion of the Vice-chair of the workshop, it was recommended that the creation of a standing committee on languages, cultures and communications be placed on the agenda of an upcoming meeting.