

gage in making use of each other's cultural and spiritual findings. The penetration of Eastern religions to the West, repercussions of Western political, cultural, and economic developments in the East, and most significantly, the expansion of global electronic communication have all rendered dialogue among civilizations a reality close to home. Gradually, these developments should penetrate to deeper layers of our lives. As elements of World Culture seep through—and these should, of course, be deliberately screened—common underground water tables would form connecting disparate cultural and geographical regions. The science of “sermiotics” provides us with tools to excavate common underground links and thereby approach the “common language” that we need for any dialogue.

We should listen in earnest to what other cultures offer, and by relying on profound human experiences we can seek new ways for human life.

Dialogue is not easy. Even more difficult is to prepare and open up vistas upon one's inner existence to others. Believing in dialogue paves the way for vivacious hope: the hope to live in a world permeated by virtue, humility, and love, and not merely by the reign of economic indices and destructive weapons. Should the spirit of dialogue prevail, humanity, culture, and civilization should prevail. We should all have faith in this triumph, and we should all hope that all citizens of the world would be prepared to listen to the divine call: “So Announce the Good News To My Servants—Those Who Listen To the Word, and Follow the Best [meaning] In It” (Holy Quran, 39: parts of 17, 18).

Let us hope that enmity and oppression should end, and that the clamor of love for truth, justice, and human dignity should prevail. Let us hope that all human beings should sing along with Hafez of Shiraz, this divinely inspired spirit, that: “No ineffable clamor reverberates in the grand heavenly dome more sweetly than the sound of love.” Thank you.

Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani

‘That Peoples May Know One Another’

From the address by His Highness Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, to the roundtable meeting on the Dialogue among Civilizations, during the UN Millennium Summit, on Sept. 5:

... The choice of “Dialogue among Civilizations” as a theme for the roundtable, and activity within the framework of the

Millennium Assembly organized by the United Nations, was extremely opportune due to the utmost importance this subject represents to the world in the post-Cold War era. We are, therefore, indebted to President Mohammad Ali Khatami of the Islamic Republic of Iran for his initiative in raising this subject. Indeed, it is not surprising that such a call should emanate from him due to his profound knowledge of both the Islamic and Western cultures and because of his past responsibilities of cultural affairs and his present responsibilities as President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. . . .

The importance of this meeting is evident from the theme chosen for it—Dialogue among Civilizations. The theme is also indicative of the positions of those present here regarding the issue of the relationship between different civilizations and the fact that it is based on positive interaction which we all enrich. It is, accordingly, a most eloquent repudiation of those counter-claims that were circulated a few years ago and culminated in a well-known essay entitled “The Clash of Civilizations?” written by the American political scientist Samuel P. Huntington and published in the Summer 1993 issue of the periodical *Foreign Affairs*. In that essay, Mr. Huntington gives expression to the dangerous idea that the post-Cold War world will witness an increase in conflicts within and among states because of cultural differences. Basing his theory on the premise that differences among civilizations are not only real, but also fundamental, he asserts that in a world that is becoming smaller, shrinking distances are increasing interactions between the peoples of different civilizations, thus intensifying the awareness of differences between civilizations; local identities and loyalties as well as national ties are weakening and are being replaced by allegiance to religion; the growing power of the West is creating an increased animosity toward it among the members of the other civilizations; and cultural characteristics and differences do not readily disappear but could, perhaps, acquire regional dimensions leading to the emergence of major regional groupings in North America, Europe, and East Asia.

For those reasons, he foresees the clash of civilizations occurring at two levels. At a lower level, namely, within states, tensions would escalate between culturally different groups, and may explode into violence, as a result of rivalries for control over territory and people. At a higher level, states from different civilizations would compete among themselves in order to acquire greater military and economic power, gain control over international institutions and third parties, and spread their own political and religious values.

The Nation-State

No doubt, this hypothesis, although put forward by a well-respected intellectual such as Samuel P. Huntington, is replete with contradiction and is inconsistent with historical facts and with reality. Moreover, it has dangerous political conse-

quences. The shrinking of distances in the world as a result of scientific and technological breakthroughs might, for instance, result in bringing people closer together, when they discover that despite differences in color, religion, and language, major common and shared interests bind them. Examples of such interests are many and varied, such as the hundreds of millions of viewers around the world who simultaneously enjoy a historic moment of happenings somewhere on the globe, or political events take place in a certain country, such as the Olympic games that are about to start in a few days from now, or those who watch transmitted pictorial programs or empathize with the same ideas, to cite just a few. In addition, the process of modernization throughout the world may well weaken the effect of the primary ethnic or linguistic loyalties in shaping peoples' consciousness. This theory also ignores the fact that substantial differences exist between members of the same culture. Had there not been wars between Britain and France, China and Japan, or Iraq and Kuwait? Yet in each of those examples the combatants belonged to the same cultural-religious group. Finally, it is still states, not civilizations or cultures, that form the basic units in international relations. States act in accordance with the dictates of their strategic economic, political, and military interests and not necessarily on the basis of their cultural affiliations alone.

More importantly, however, are the dangerous political consequences inherent in this theory, since it presumes that because people differ in their cultural affiliations, this would, by definition, create tensions and conflicts between them. The most acute, and the most perilous, of such differences would be between the West and the rest of the world, particularly the Islamic and Confucian civilizations. Indeed, there is evidence that foreign policy planners and some members of parliament in major powers have started formulating policies for confronting countries of different cultures, civilizations, and religions, and taking the position of both judge and watchman toward them.

Differences Are Reasons for Collaboration

Proceeding from our Arab Islamic civilization we, in fact, utterly reject such orientations. In our view, differences among people are reasons for cooperation and collaboration, for the welfare of all.

Our Holy Qur'an states: "We have made thee peoples and tribes that ye may know each other," and emphasizes that the best humans in the eyes of God are the most pious and the most dedicated to their work: "The most honored among thee in the sight of God are the most pious." Islam's prophet Mohammad, the prayers and praise of Allah be upon him, stressed that same idea: "Arabs are not privileged over non-Arabs except in piety," and added that it is the duty of Muslims to search for knowledge everywhere and in every group of humans, when he said: "Seek knowledge even in China."

These values of tolerance have been reflected in our Arab Islamic civilization, which was characterized by acceptance from the adherents of the other heavenly religions, Christianity and Judaism, and by the quest for the sources of knowledge in the old Indian, Persian, and Greek civilizations. It is this openness to the various civilizations of the world as experienced by the Muslims during the peak of their civilization between the 7th and 13th Centuries that enabled them to add some brilliant contributions to human civilization and to become the link not only between what was then known as the West of the world and its East, but also between the older and new civilizations. Through the quills of the likes of Ibn Rushd, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina (Avicenna), to cite a few, the Arabs transmitted a great part of the knowledge of the Greeks to the rest of Europe near the end of its Medieval Age. . . .

As regards the subjects for discussion in this roundtable, such as the definition of the parties to the dialogue of civilizations and the role of the United Nations and its agencies in this respect, we believe, first, that the definition of culture or civilization should not be rigid. It should not link culture exclusively to religion or language, nor to geographical affiliation or shared historical experiences alone. Second, the dialogue should be open between the representatives of all the governments and peoples, regardless of their diverse affiliations. Without doubt, the United Nations, with its specialized agencies and numerous activities aimed at consolidating international peace and security and promoting friendly relations between peoples, is an outstanding example of this effective and fruitful dialogue between civilizations. Its member governments represent most of the fundamental cultural groupings in the world today. They participate in its activities for the good of them all, be that by putting an end to armed conflicts and finding solutions for them, or by furthering international cooperation in many fields—from drug control to catastrophe management—and promoting economic and social development in all its aspects.

The Mass Media

However, the danger in advocating the clash of civilizations by some of the mass media in the West requires specific action by the United Nations aimed at combatting the various effects of this theory which would lead to an escalation of tensions in the world, at the time when we were hoping that the end of the Cold War would mean reducing the reasons for these tensions, and bringing about harmony and concordance among all peoples, regardless of any divergence in their cultural affiliations.

For this reason, we could perhaps suggest that the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) play an essential role in this respect. UNESCO's constitution says that it is in the minds of men that wars first start. Similarly, it is in the minds of people that any probable

clash of civilizations would also start, through an erroneous perception and a fallacious mental image of other human groups. UNESCO may want to conduct the dialogue on strengthening relations between human groups from different cultural backgrounds at three levels:

The first level, to be comprised of a purely scientific activity involving scholars in history, politics, and social sciences, with a view to disclosing the truth of the claims of the so-called clash of civilizations and whether what appeared to be a clash of civilizations was, in actual fact, a result of either conflicting strategic, economic, political, and military interests, or manipulation of the basic loyalties of people in order to serve the narrow interests of political leaderships.

The second level, to be mainly geared toward the men and women who are the opinion shapers in the public information field and all its media, with a view to exploring the best ways to clarify the effects of erroneous images that the media might convey of groups from differing cultures. This activity could also include the faculties and administrators of educational institutions, especially those responsible for deciding the curricula, particularly those intended for the young in their earlier formative stages.

The third level would bring together political leaders and statesmen from different cultural groups with the aim of eliminating tensions between those groups and reducing the prospects for clashes between them. . . .

Abdelaziz Bouteflika

'Know Yourself by Knowing the Other'

Excerpts from the speech of Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to the roundtable of the UN Economic, Social, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Emphasis is Mr. Bouteflika's.

If asked why the year 2001 has been proclaimed as the United Nations Year for Dialogue among Civilizations, I would say that if men's lives can be measured in terms of years, that of ideologies in terms of decades, and that of nations



in centuries, the unit of time for civilizations, born of the interaction among the ones and the others, is indeed the millennium.

Throughout the last millennia, the seven or eight main civilizations of the world took the mold of the great religions, which had constituted their cradle. As temporal ambitions, demography of economy allowed, their continuous interactions led to an alternation of dialogue and confrontation, in a continuously renewed movement of ebb and flow.

Today, we are legitimately willing to regulate, at the planetary level, these variations, in order to favor dialogue over conflict, and further ensure the promotion of peace.

Otherwise, and having just got out of an ideological conflict which could have triggered disastrous consequences, we run the risk of moving straight toward an even more dangerous explosion of violence, stemming from the polarization of the differences among our civilizations. History shows that if material power can defeat an ideology, it can not obliterate a civilization without destabilizing the whole planet.

Today's nations, which forged their independence and became aware of their identity as such, belong to cultural spaces that have durably marked their historical evolution and shaped their cultural being. The concept of nation in its most modern understanding, does not mean breaking with this civilizational heritage, consubstantial with the people's personality. It is important to assume it, rehabilitate it, and make it known as a concrete proof of human creativity, and an integral element of mankind's heritage.

Without going back too far in history, the colonial expansion of the 19th Century, to mention only the Muslim civilization my country belongs to, was manifested by attempts to obliterate this civilization, treated as a set of lifeless vestiges, a providential field for anthropologists and ethnographers seeking exoticism. Indeed, there were and there still are upright Orientalists, and—as we call them today—Islamologists above suspicion, but the fact is that the general utility of their works has often been spoilt, biased by unacceptable pre-existing ideologies, reflecting a vision that denies socio-historical realities, regarded as stilted only because the dominating ideology had decided so. . . .

A Timely Initiative

The good initiative was taken by my brother H.E. Mohammad Khatami, President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, to proclaim the Year 2001, the United Nations Year for Dialogue among Civilizations, is particularly well-timed. It occurs, indeed, at a time when we wonder about the possibility to maintain a fertile and balanced dialogue among civilizations having very different levels of material development, and furthermore, within the reductive context of globalization.

Countries poor in resources but rich in culture could rightly fear that some of the ethic and social values they are attached to, and which had already suffered from the colonial