

THE HAGUE AGENDA ON CITY DIPLOMACY

Composed during the First World Conference on City Diplomacy, The Role of Local Governments in Conflict Prevention, Peace Building and Post-Conflict Reconstruction, organized by UCLG, the city of The Hague, and the Association of Netherlands Municipalities (VNG), in close collaboration with the province and city of Barcelona and the Italian Coordination of Local Authorities for Peace and Human Rights in the Peace Palace in The Hague from the 11th to the 13th of June, 2008.

We, the conference participants, on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights:

Convinced that it is our common concern to prevent and eliminate violent conflicts, to protect human rights and to achieve peace and justice.

Concerned about the ongoing threat of violent conflicts in this world to the security and wellbeing of our citizens, recalling that in the last decade more than 15 million people have lost their lives to conflicts and 40 million people have been forced to flee their homes.

Concerned about the rise of extremism in our societies, of intolerance and tensions between and among communities of different cultures, ethnicities, religion and traditions, which often become a source of conflict.

Feeling the urge to act on the calls from local governments dealing with situations of violent conflict, assist them in their efforts to strive for a peaceful environment in which internationally recognized human rights of all citizens are respected and show solidarity with colleagues working in those situations.

Believing that it is the duty of local governments to work for peace, freedom, democracy and prosperity and by doing so to contribute to the international development and peace-building agenda; we believe that local government, the government layer closest to the people, can truly feel the needs of their citizens and are in a unique position to respond to these needs in times of conflict.

Being aware that the changing nature of conflict confronts local governments increasingly with the responsibility to secure the wellbeing of their citizens and that sustainable development could contribute to the solution of conflict whatever its origin (economic, political, religious and cultural).

Defining city diplomacy as the tool of local governments and their associations in promoting social cohesion, conflict prevention, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction with the aim to create a stable environment, in which the citizens can live together in peace, democracy and prosperity.

Emphasising the importance of effective decentralisation and local self-government as a condition for local governments to play their role in peace-building.

Considering that the establishment of peace is inseparable from the active involvement of women.

Affirming that local governments and their associations will work together where possible in multi-level partnerships with central governments, international governmental institutions and civil society organizations to contribute to peace processes.

Recalling the commitment of local governments expressed in the Final Declaration of the UCLG Congress *“Changing Cities are Driving our World”* (Jeju, October 2007), noting in particular the following statement ‘We support the initiative of the Mayors for Peace campaign which lobbies the international community to renounce weapons of mass destruction. We call on nation states and armed groups to cease considering cities as military objectives’.

Reaffirming the commitment in the above mentioned Final Declaration to promote all human rights and respect diversity in our cities and territories as a foundation for peace and development.

We considerer that:

*** All stakeholders are needed to achieve peace and justice and human security**

The UN World Summit agreed in 2005, for the first time, that states have a primary responsibility to protect their own populations and that the international community has a responsibility to act when these governments fail to protect the most vulnerable among us. However, huge human challenges like the shortage of food and drinking water, the climate change, poverty, migration, good governance of cultural, religious and ethnic diversity and urgently require increased capacity to prevent conflicts and to act together for peace and justice for human mankind. In this striving for peace, justice and human security all possible stakeholders are needed.

*** The role of local governments has been insufficiently recognised and supported**

Having said this, it is remarkable that the role of local governments and their national associations in conflict prevention, post-conflict resolution and peace building has been insufficiently recognised and supported in national and international policy decision making, intervention strategies and research. No doubt local governments are confronted with the negative effects of violent ethnic, religious or social conflicts on the lives and wellbeing of their citizens. In many places local governments in close cooperation with local organisations play or have played a crucial role to prevent conflicts, to build bridges after conflicts and to promote a peaceful environment. As the government sphere closest to the people they are in a unique position to contribute to conflict prevention and resolution. Unfortunately, local governments can also use this position to aggravate conflicts and to thwart post conflict reconstruction and peace building initiatives. Serious policies for conflict prevention and peace intervention strategies should much more appreciate the crucial position and choices of local governments in this field.

*** City diplomacy can contribute to prevent and resolve violent conflicts**

That is why the world organisation of local governments and cities (UCLG) has identified this role of local governments in peace building as one of its main priorities right from the start of the new organisation in 2003 and installed a Committee on City Diplomacy. The City Diplomacy Committee concluded that decisions and actions of local governments and the commitment of the local leadership to democratic and transparent decision making, can contribute significantly to the prevention and resolution of violent conflicts. Moreover local governments outside the conflict area have important possibilities to help local governments in conflict areas to cope with conflict and post conflict situations. It was decided that a first international congress on this issue should be organised in order to gain more insight into the practical peace building activities of local governments and to define a well-based political agenda for the work of UCLG in this regard. Inspiring preparatory meetings for this international congress were held in Perugia (autumn 2006), organised by the Italian Coordination of Local Authorities for Peace and Human Rights, and in Barcelona (autumn 2007) organised by the Province and City of Barcelona. It became clear that the attention for the role of local governments in conflict resolution is still in its infancy. But further involvement of local governments in peace building is indispensable to achieve more effective policies in this field.

We propose, as an outcome of this First World Congress on City Diplomacy, to implement together a series of activities as described in the following agenda:

1. Developing Local Government Peace-Building Initiatives

On the one hand we will build up our understanding of the strategies local governments have developed in peace-building, so that local governments confronted with conflicts can implement better policies. On the other hand we will strongly encourage local governments and their national associations to play a role in conflict prevention and strengthen our international network of local governments and national associations that make this commitment.

Recommended concrete actions:

- Local politicians should be called upon to take their responsibility and use their local leadership to participate in peace-building initiatives; stimulate local governments to develop projects in this area and to mobilise resources to this end.
- A solid group of local politicians and local government officials who are available for activities related to peace building should be built up and registered in accessible databases managed by the national associations of local governments.
- The UCLG City Diplomacy Committee should assist local governments in conflict areas in drawing national and international public attention for their specific situation through concrete initiatives.
- UCLG and its membership should actively seek cooperation with civil society organisations and local government related international organisations striving for peace.
- UCLG should be enabled to increase its staff working in the field of post conflict reconstruction and peace building.

2. Getting recognition for the role of local government in peace building

UCLG will actively seek connection with other levels of governance and will propose and promote joint action between (inter)national governments and local governments in peace-building operations. The multi-level governance approach is needed for more effective peace building strategies.

Recommended concrete actions:

- National governments and multilateral institutions should be requested by UCLG and its members to ensure local governments' inputs in the definition of peace interventions strategies and to include local governments in post conflict recovery interventions and peace building initiatives.
- UCLG should work on the development of Memoranda of Understanding with international governmental institutions on the basis of a joint city diplomacy vision. Such a Memorandum has already been agreed with the UN Initiative of the Alliance of Civilizations. New partnerships on this base are envisaged with:
 - The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
 - The Committee of the Regions of the European Union
 - The UN Peace Building Commission;
 - The UN Department of Political Affairs;
 - The UNDP Bureau for Crisis Prevention and Recovery;
 - The Fragile and Conflict-affected Countries Group of the World Bank.
- We welcome the initiative of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe to develop an European Charter on City Diplomacy and to investigate the possibilities for the creation of a city diplomacy fund. UCLG is recommended to work on a World Charter on City Diplomacy.

- UCLG and its members should lobby national governments and international institutions to financially support local government's peace initiatives.
- The international community should be called upon to involve existing local government organizations in peace-building operations in order to ensure ownership and full participation of local governments. The international community is called on to support the development of capacities of these structures should it be necessary. The creation of new structures should be exceptional and answer a concrete need.
- UCLG should be encouraged to offer its participation and support to the donor community as soon as new peace intervention strategies are envisaged, also by recommending involvement of individual members with expertise in the field of post conflict reconstruction.

3. Improving the quality of City Diplomacy

UCLG will contribute to enhancing the quality of the involvement of local governments and their associations in peace building programmes by (amongst others) stimulating research in the field of city diplomacy and actively disseminating best practices and experience built up by its membership in this field.

Recommended concrete actions:

- The website of UCLG should provide research data and best practises of the membership that can be used by local governments involved in projects and programmes in this field.
- The development of training programmes and proper documentation for city leaders and staff of local governments and their associations to improve the quality of their city diplomacy actions should be supported.
- UCLG and its members is encouraged to seek active cooperation with universities and other relevant research institutes to carry out research into the role of local governments in conflict resolution and peace-building.
- UCLG should commit itself to promote the involvement of women in local government supported peace-building activities.

4. Promoting a culture of peace

UCLG will stimulate the development of initiatives of local governments to promote a culture of peace within their own municipalities. A culture of peace has two dimensions: raising awareness of citizens for the importance of peace-building in conflict situations and promoting human rights and harmonious relationships within the own community. This will entail giving a good overview of the different instruments a local government could adopt to contribute to peace.

Recommended concrete actions:

- Based on the results of the City Diplomacy Congress the 'Template for a City of Peace' should be developed, which helps local governments to make informed decisions on whether and how they want to promote peace, human rights and justice and how they can elaborate a coherent policy in this matter.
- A bi-annual local government Peace Prize should be launched. This Peace Prize should be received by local governments or local government leaders who have helped local governments in conflict areas in their striving for peace and justice or who have worked to prevent or overcome conflicts within their own community. (The City Diplomacy Peace Prize).
- UCLG is encouraged to stimulate multicultural dialogue and the development of tools for awareness raising, as well as youth exchange programmes, production of school materials and adapting the press and communication strategies of the local governments.

5. Assisting local governments in situations of violent conflict

UCLG will develop guidelines for deciding whether or not, and how, to undertake joint action at the request of member local governments and associations in need.

Recommended concrete actions:

- The UCLG Committee of City Diplomacy should propose guidelines to be followed by the World Organization to facilitate a fast and proper response to members in crisis and conflict situations, which might consist of solidarity and monitoring missions and the introduction of early warning systems.
- The advice of other organisations dealing with such issues should be sought e.g. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.
- UCLG should advocate and facilitate city-to-city cooperation between local governments which faced conflicts in the past and local governments emerging from conflicts, in particular in respect to truth finding, reintegration of ex-combatants, after care of the victims, and creating conditions of the sustainable return of internally displaced persons and refugees.

We welcome that the promotion of peace is a high political priority of the World Organization of United Cities and Local Governments as a whole. We call on UCLG, its members and partners, and in particular its Committee on City Diplomacy, to support the implementation of *The Hague Agenda* in the coming years and to promote its ambitions and ensure the mobilization of resources to achieve tangible results.