



NOTE

For the

Panel discussion: How to deal with intercultural crisis? Is an AoC crisis management mechanism necessary? What would it look like?

(5th Focal Points Meeting, Berlin, 27 May 2010)

Background

Episodes and incidents involving a cultural dimension have multiplied around the world. From the cartoons in Denmark to the controversy over the use of the word “Allah” in Malaysia, pastor Jones case in the U.S, sectarian violence involving Christians and Muslims in northern and central Nigeria – juts to mention a few examples -, tensions of a very different nature but reflecting all a cultural character can sometimes have a widespread impact and lead to outright violence.

The very complexity of the issues raised by these crises and the fact that they reflect tensions at the intersection of culture, religion and politics, mean that it is sometimes difficult, within the UN system, to identify what course of action should be chosen to address them effectively.

From early detection of signs that a crisis is brewing and providing real-time analysis about them (risk assessment), initiatives by honest brokers to defuse tensions (preventive action) to crisis management (once disruptive actions and unrest occurred that need to be addressed by means of soft power tools) and consolidation of peace (through facilitation of dialogue and reconciliation), all these dimensions have to be taken into consideration both as independent fields of action and parts of a whole.

The working session aims at encouraging an informed debate on this issue and to explore ways for the Alliance to engage in this field bringing added value to the existing mechanisms by complementing or reinforcing them.

Depending on the first discussion, announced by the High Representative at the last Ministerial meeting, experts familiar with different forms of early warning and rapid response in different contexts may be later invited to contribute.

Questions

A number of questions come to mind. Their inclusion in this note is only meant to stimulate discussion. They should not be read as proposals for action at this stage. They can be summarized as follows:

1-What are the mechanisms already available?

Mapping out the existing resources is a necessary preliminary step to be made in order to avoid duplications and waste of scarce resources.

Some of the partners may want to share the experience of their organization on this field or the knowledge they have about it.

The advantages and inconveniences of creating synergies between the existing mechanisms may also be discussed as well as the need to create new ones.

2- A new mechanism – what for ?

The AOC as the UN initiative aimed specifically at addressing cultural divides is supposed to prevent and manage cultural tensions, crisis and conflicts further to its long term action to promote intercultural dialogue and cooperation.

From past experience, it the UNAOC can better react to crisis and conflicts. It also seems that early warning is a critical part of crisis prevention and management.

In designing a mechanism for preventive action, a step by step approach could be developed starting by implementing an early warning and early response mechanism which will be followed by further steps towards crisis management which involves dealing with threats after they have occurred.

3- Using existing UNAOC resources: the RRMM

To a certain extent the Rapid Response Media Mechanism (RRMM) is a media early warning mechanism on Intercultural Crises. It could easily be

reinforced in order to become an early warning and early response mechanism “*tout court*” (not limited to media) available to decision makers in the UN system.

The existing network of Global experts could be reinforced and expanded in order to allow them to raise „red flags“ about looming crises and to provide detailed analysis in real time about emerging crises.

Furthermore partnerships with members of the Alliance having implemented similar mechanisms (such as the EU and the OSCE) as well new partnerships with relevant players (such as for instance UN country offices but also think tanks such as the International Crisis Group) could allow to share information and resources that will allow to form a pool of designated experts within the UN Alliance of Civilizations’ Global Expert Finder (GEF) network who will be in charge of producing periodically short reports providing background, analysis of the situation and recommendations for action.

Depending on the severity of the issue, such reports would be shared by the High Representative to various levels of decision-makers within the UN system or to other interlocutors, according to a case by case decision made by him.

In case of serious religious and cultural tensions that have the potential of destabilizing societies and leading to fully fledged conflicts, these reports, completed with additional information that the High Representative may get from various consultations would be shared with the Secretary-General, providing him with in-depth analysis and, as the case may be, recommendations for actions .

The Early Warning and Early Response mechanism on Intercultural Crises would use three different tools:

- Crisis alerts – Short analysis reports sent out as soon as a potential crisis is detected.

- Monthly situation reports – Detailed analysis reports reviewing hotspots and areas of potential intercultural tensions around the world.
- Recommendations for action – response-options and time based strategies to be issued by the High Representative

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