

FINAL REPORT ON THE FORUM OF ARTS AND CULTURE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE UNITED NATION CONVENTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

The First Forum of Artists and Intellectuals in the context of the implementation of the United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification, held at the Convention Palace of Havana, August 30th and 31st, in the framework of the VI Conference of the Parties (COP6).

Thirty-three personalities attended to the Forum of Arts and Culture coming from 15 countries of different geographic regions: Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America.

The opening ceremony was presided by the Ambassador Mr. Hama Alba Diallo, Executive Secretary of the Convention; Mr. Rogatien Bijou, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Benin; Mr. Francisco José Lacayo, UNESCO's Director of the Regional Office of Culture for Latin America and the Caribbean; and its Representative in Cuba, Dr. Armando Hart Dávalos, member of the Council of State of the Republic of Cuba; Mr. Carlos Martí, President of the Cuban National Association of Writers and Artists; and Mr. Ismael González, Cuban Vice-Minister of Culture.

The Executive Secretary of the Convention, Mr. Hama Alba Diallo pronounced the opening words. Afterwards, the UNESCO's Representative in Cuba, Mr. Francisco José Lacayo, and the Cuban Vice-Minister of Culture Ismael González were given the floor, during the ceremony.

As a proposal from the Executive Secretary, we proceeded to the election of the meeting facilitator, being elected Mr. Marcelino dos Santos, a Mozambican poet of a great international recognition.

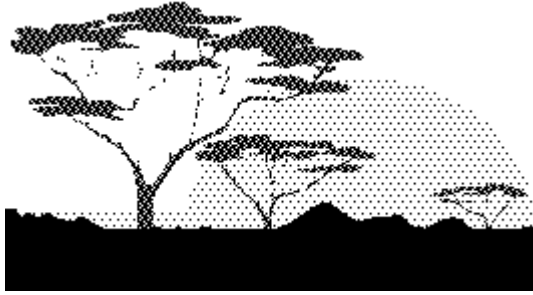
In the initial part of the event, the film "*La vie sur terre*" by the important Mauritanian producer, Mr A. Sissako, was showed. Many participants pronounced on this film, and highlighted the valuable contribution of the film and his author in the struggle for a better world.

A special intervention by Mrs. Aminata Traore, from Mali, who supported her presentation on audiovisual means, took place. After being read the basis and objectives of the Forum, began the debating process of two significant documents previously submitted to the consideration of the participants: The Call of Culture and the Program of Action projects.

During the debating process of these documents, it was clear, as the UNESCO's Representative pointed out that in front of the harm derived from Desertification and Drought, and consequently poverty, "the saving answer could not only emerge from natural sciences and technology fields. The struggle against desertification claims for an holistic approach and action, wherein social sciences, education, and the world of culture, contribute not only with the analysis, sensitiveness, and proposals, but also, politics willingness movements in all social sectors".

After a deep brainstorming debate on the documents and ideas developed during the discussions, we proceeded with the considerations and approval of the Call of Culture, which has a Program of Action with 39 points (Attached, Call of Culture and Program of Action).

As an incentive for the participants of the Forum and the struggle to create a new culture of nature, we received a message sent by the Noble Prize of Peace, Mrs. Rigoberta Menchú Tum, who stated about her hope that "this



Forum of Artists and Intellectuals to Combat Desertification must be rich in the dissemination of proposals and ecological rescue. How beautiful it would be, creators could devote all their talent and creativeness they use in their art to preserve natural resources!”

Among the most relevant agreements of the forum is the one considered as the First Forum of Artists and Intellectuals in the context of the United Nation Convention to Combat Desertification and Drought, which means to develop a continuity to this type of event, and its celebration every two years together with the Conference of the Parties.

A special emphasis was made on the need of coordinating efforts with several international and national institutions and agencies with the aim to proceed and put into force the decisions adopted during the event.

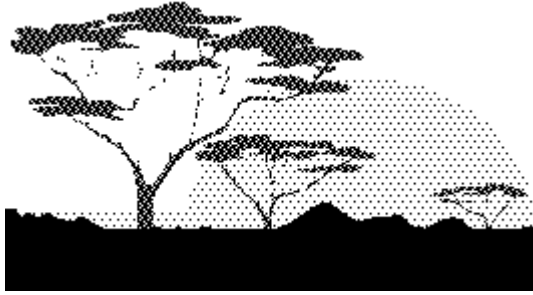
The Ambassador Mr. Oscar Oramas Oliva, special adviser of the Executive Secretary, pronounced the closing words, highlighting the importance of the event, appreciating the contribution of several agencies such as UNESCO, and the attendance of all participants...

Finally, in the presence of COP6 plenary, we proceeded to read a summary of the report of the First Forum of Artists and Intellectuals to Combat Desertification (attached, summary of the report).

During this event many activities took place such as the opening of an art exhibit on the topic of desertification, where thirty works made by outstanding Cuban painters were exhibited, and the performance by the choir Ensamble Vocal Luna, of the song “Water Friend” especially conceived for this event by the Cuban author Roberto Valera. The Cuban writer, Pablo Armando Fernández, National Prize of literature, delighted the audience with his great poem “In the beginning water ruled” dedicated especially to the Forum. Another poet, from Venezuela, Tarek William, also showed his sensitiveness, when in one of the session he read his poem “Sun of Manapares”.

A relevant cultural success was the delivery of a valuable pictorial work, “Costume of peace for Nena Island” by the Puerto Rican painter, Pablo Marcano.

As part of the cultural program, participants had the presence of the famous African musician, Salif Keita, from Mali, who enjoys international recognition and prestige; and the presence of the Puerto Rican singer and composer Danny Rivera, who sang a song especially written for this event: “Brothers of earth”.



Final considerations:

There is no doubt, this first Forum constituted an appropriate framework for men and women, of precedent culture from different regions of the world, brainstorming on the roll they play in the search of convergence points in the agreement of actions and projects to carry out creativeness from different fields of arts and culture, so as it is indicated in the Call of Culture, aiming at improving the quality of life in affected areas of the planet.

It is a significant step forward that together with the effort made by scientists and technicians, parliamentarians, and NGOs, in the context of the application of the Convention, to add artists' and intellectuals' effort, which if it is systematized, could greatly be part of assistance in the struggle to mitigate the sufferance of people affected by desertification, drought, and its eternal companion: poverty.

The point is that these agreements and decisions adopted by the forum don't fall into emptiness, as another exercise of imagination. It is clear that more than will, financial resources to carry out an action of strategy is needed. In this sense, there should be to continue to manage with agencies as UNESCO and other financial institutions or governments capable of contributing with the materialization of such a generous project.

Havana, September 10th, 2003