

Executive Summary of the World Forum on Urban Violence and Education for Coexistence and Peace

The Dimension of the Forum in Figures

The World Forum on Urban Violence and Education for Coexistence and Peace was held on 19th, 20th and 21st April 2017 at La N@ve de Villaverde and was organised by Madrid City Council. The initiative came about from the Mayoress of Madrid, Manuela Carmena, and the Mayoress of Paris, Anne Hidalgo, who wanted to foster joint reflection on how to build cities of peace following the Paris attacks in November 2015. The opening of the Forum was attended by King Felipe VI.

3,532 people from 109 countries were registered in the meeting and were able to find out about 259 peace experiences from all around the world, presented at the plenary sessions and debate tables, which included the participation of 146 speakers. There were also 90 self-managed workshops by non-governmental organisations, neighbourhood associations, district boards and international bodies.

The Main Message of the Forum

The transversal conclusion that was the driving thread throughout all of the plenary sessions, debate tables and workshops is two-pronged. On one hand, specific emphasis was placed on the fact that violence is avoidable, as compared to approaches that consider it to be innate in human nature and life in society. At all of the sessions, it was made clear that political willingness and a clear commitment to education is required to eliminate violence. On the other hand, organisations from civil society and local authorities wanted to highlight that local entities can do a lot to eradicate violence: implement street level policy, encourage participation and promote meeting points, make a good diagnosis (with the participation of citizens) of coexistence problems in each city in order to come up with potential solutions, foster education as the main antidote against violence, move away from solely punitive or security approaches, act and apply pressure so as to ensure a dignified life for all residents, foster a culture of peace with new stories, new imaginaries, figures such as mediation, meeting points and a commitment to caring cities...

Numerous types of violence, numerous analyses

As indicated in the title of the Forum, reference was made to the different types of violence that affect urban environments and the causes were examined in

depth in order to face this reality and eradicate it. Not in vain, one of the main conclusions in many of the plenary sessions, debate tables and workshops was the need to make a good participative diagnosis of the numerous types of violence that occurs in cities.

Likewise, the analysis perspective of the meeting was a far cry from reductionism that merely understands violence as physical aggression and the debate and reflections presented addressed the iceberg of violence to reflect together on less visible types of violence. Therefore, structural violence was addressed in greater detail, discussing social inequality, exclusion, the lack of access to basic social services such as education and healthcare, the lack of democratic participation and the violation of human rights, as well as cuts in development cooperation. Furthermore, cultural violence was discussed during the Forum, reflecting on it by addressing racism, sexism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, the culture of violence...

The debate tables focused on specific expressions of violence in cities. More specifically, education was discussed in great detail, analysing the impact of juvenile street gangs and bullying in schools and institutes. Furthermore, xenophobia and racism were specifically addressed at a debate table. International terrorism was addressed at a special analysis table. LGTB-phobia was also discussed. Urban inequality and public spaces were analysed as causes of violence that affect cities at another of the debate tables. The margin of action of cities in light of the refugee crisis was analysed at another debate table. Sexism and gender-based violence was another of the themes of the debate tables at the Forum. Once more, the culture of violence, education and values to specifically address violence in sport were discussed.

Let's look at the main conclusions of the plenary sessions and debate tables in further detail.

The Key Points of the Opening Ceremony

At the opening ceremony, the Mayoress of Madrid, Manuela Carmena, recalled Nelson Mandela to show that the least violent societies are those in which the authorities exercise less violence and where human rights are respected. She also pointed out that the purpose of the Forum is to collect and disseminate numerous good practices that contribute to ending violence. Anne Hidalgo, Mayoress of Paris, highlighted the commitment to dialogue, respect and the law as rules to follow in order to coexist in society, as tools to build peace. Felipe VI included this initiative in the Sustainable Development Objectives for the Agenda 2030, particularly in relation to achieving inclusive, safe, resilient, fair, peaceful and sustainable cities. Felipe VI mentioned that creating a true peace culture is a responsibility that involves us all.

Main Ideas of the “Cities of Peace” Plenary Session

In the first plenary session, we learnt about experiences in Madrid in relation to Latin bands, condemned sexual violence in India, talked about the capacities to build peace and dealt with the climate challenge. The Mayoresses of Madrid, Paris and Rome (Manuela Carmena, Anne Hidalgo and Virginia Raggi, respectively), Federico Mayor Zaragoza, President of the Foundation for a Culture of Peace, and Leila Zerrougui, former special representative of the UN Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict highlighted the importance of diagnosing violence in cities and analysing its causes. It was also considered that lack of solidarity is a form of violence that may end up affecting cities, because we live in an independent world. There was much debate on the need to understand the causes of violence, which does not mean condemning it but helping to prevent it. It was recognised that one of the keys to doing so is the creation of social tissue and the defence of equal dignity for all people. Furthermore, both Manuela Carmena and Federico Mayor Zaragoza highlighted the importance of women to change the culture of violence to one of peace.

The Bases for Fostering “Governance for Peace”

The second plenary session, “Governance for Peace”, included the intervention of the analyst, Johan Galtung, and the good experiences of Brazil (dialogue tables after an environmental disaster), South Africa (creation of spaces of inclusion and community to overcome the apartheid) and the Philippines (study of new, more positive means of transport). Galtung pointed out that the media talks about violence a lot but does not know how to inform about a peace culture. Likewise, our cities are full of monuments that celebrate victories in battles. He is committed to replacing these monuments with monuments of love and pointed out that this transformation does not raise a problem of resources but one of political willingness. Juma Assiago, from ONU-Habitat, is committed to social justice and the fight against exclusion to eradicate violence, compared to security approaches that criminalize populations. Virginia Raggi, Mayoress of Rome, highlighted the idea of a city as a community, a place where people can feel part of a common project, in which nobody feels excluded. She is committed to fostering citizen participation as a way of building cities of peace and coexistence. José Corral, President of Mercocities, added to the debate the need to build resilience in cities, providing local governments with more resources. Ketcha Courtes, Mayoress of Bangangté (Cameroon) highlighted that it is the responsibility of Governments to foster meetings and the mutual knowledge of citizens as the unknown fosters violence, and she considers that more women should be at the helm of local management in the same way as they manage their homes. Patrick Keuleers, from UNPD, recalled the link between development and peace and, particularly that exclusion generates violence.

In the dialogue, Ignacio Murgui, Councillor for Regional Coordination at Madrid City Council, highlighted the political importance of “being together” and considered that governance for peace is not building a reality without conflict, but

a stage in which we can manage these conflicts politically compared to the idea of leaving it in the hands of the market.

Peaceful Coexistence: Key Ideas

Some of the key factors clave for peaceful coexistence are citizen participation, dialogue at street level, understanding that the city belongs to the citizens and the need to make a good diagnosis, whereby this final point was considered to be of utmost importance and does not only refer to statistics on aggressions but also exclusion, lack of access to basic social services, respect for human rights...

After hearing the experiences of Jordan, Portugal, Nicaragua, Spain and the vision of the Red Cross International Committee, the dialogue was led by Rita Maestre, spokesperson of Madrid City Council, and included the participation of the Mayor of San Salvador, Nayb Armando Bukele, who spoke of fostering the inclusion of young people with graffiti and rap, the Mayor of Granollers and Vice-president of Mayors for Peace, Josep Mayoral, who spoke of the need to govern at street level whilst cities must work as a network. Pavel Bém, Mayor of Prague and representative of the Global Commission on Drugs, provided some clues on how to fight drug trafficking, including not penalising the use of drugs. The Mayoress of Nouakchott, Mauritania, highlighted the importance of education and social participation to build peace. Rosario Ortiz Magallón, from Mexico City, talked about the dialogue that has been introduced in his city to end violence from a human rights approach and Li Changchun, Head of Public Security in Hangzhou (China) highlighted the importance of working on prevention and early warning.

Education, the search for a positive imaginary, combating the fear of the unknown and inequality are some of the ideas indicated in this plenary session for positive peace as opposed to negative peace, which is simply defined as fighting against violence rather than against the elements that cause it.

How can we educate for peace?

The final plenary session of the Forum, "Education and Values for Peace", included the presence of Nélida Zaitegi, President of the Basque Country School Board, with Juan Mari Aburto, Mayor of Bilbao, Fernando Medina, Mayor of Lisbon, or Esther Gómez, Councillor of Madrid City Council. All of these public representatives highlighted the value of politics as an activity and a commitment that enables us to live better and improve the life of people. At a time of political scepticism, knowing that not everybody is equal, choosing politicians well and becoming political subjects through indignation and anger, forcing things to be changed is essential. In the session, it was highlighted that educating for peace is building consensus from disagreements, enabling the circulation of the word, recognising diversity and the purpose of education is to promote the personal, emotional, social and academic development of people. In this context of crisis, we run the risk of having a well prepared generation with limited future prospects.

The implementation of coexistence plans and listening by local authorities are two pillars to educate for peace.

Nélida Zategi spoke of the need to train citizens in conflict management and assured that the city can be a peace laboratory through participation and fostering the feeling of belonging. “Values are only learnt by being contagious, through example”, she pointed out. “It is necessary to organise activities so that young people feel part of the solution and not just the problem”. Juan Mari Aburto, Mayor of Bilbao presented a joint decision and participative project of the values that characterise the city. Fernando Medina, Mayor of Lisbon, is committed to participative governance and highlighted that the function of City Councils is to give communities the power to coordinate projects better. Carlos Abicalil, from the OEI, considered it necessary to rely on active citizens, who call for things, demand things and move with a joint identity. He highlighted that governments should move in response to the demands of organised civil society. Esther Gómez, Councillor of Madrid City Council, highlighted that the municipal team wants to be a City Council that listens and defends public education and quality as a guarantee of equality. Gustavo Zignago, from the Government of Rosario, in Argentina, concluded paraphrasing Eduardo Galeano, stating that local education for peace “are small things”, but “little people doing little things can change the world”.

Informal education experiences of young people in Brazil, Senegal, Spain, Morocco and Lebanon (with refugees in the last case) were shared.

Keys of the closing act of the World Forum on Urban Violence and Education for Coexistence and Peace

Satisfaction and inspiration (in the words of Luis Revilla, Mayor of La Paz) following three intense days of exchange were the main features of the final session, in which the need to continue this Forum through the creation of a Technical Secretariat, a document of commitments and the intention to hold further editions of this meeting with different venues was explained. All those present went away with the idea that a life without violence is difficult but not impossible, and is therefore, a challenge. It was highlighted in this session that violence hinders progress. The Forum closed with hope and illusion thanks to the mobilization of civil society and putting value on understanding politics as active listening, participation and service to citizens.

Rebeca Grynspan, from SEGIB, understands that the city is the stage to understand that the relationship with others is the base for building a better society. “The path of humanity inevitably involves cooperation”, concluded Manuela Carmena, Mayoress of Madrid.

The Madrid Commitment

In the final document of the Forum, called the Madrid Commitment, presented at this closing act, reinforces the commitment to peace and against war, calling for national Governments to create plans for the prevention of violence, demanding an end to corruption, announcing the creation of local action plans to deal with urban violence and educate for peace, fostering social inclusion and city policies, mediation instruments and doing away with the security and punitive approach when it comes to facing urban violence, defending programmes of coexistence, respect and diversity and recognising the Right to the City based on a human rights and sustainability approach.