

**Fiftieth Anniversary of the First International Congress of
Black Writers and Artists (Paris, 19-22 September 2006)**

DECLARATION OF PARIS

“The shortest path to the future is always the one that involves looking deeper into the past”.

Aimé Césaire, 1955¹

PREAMBLE

The First International Congress of Black Writers and Artists was held at the Sorbonne, in Paris, from 19 to 22 September 1956, one year after the Bandung Conference, under the auspices of the journal *Présence Africaine*, founded in 1947 by Alioune Diop. The Congress gave rise to the African Society of Culture in 1956.

The meeting followed the 1945 Pan-African Congress, held in Manchester, which called for independence for the colonies in a world marked by the defeat of Nazism and fascism, and the condemnation of anti-Semitism, all forms of racism and colonialism.

The First Congress advanced major principles and key ideas that are equally relevant today at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when cultures, civilizations and geopolitics have to confront the process of globalization.

The First Congress, described as the “Cultural Bandung”, was meant to promote the idea of the “civilization of the universal”. It was here that the concept of cultural diversity took shape. The Congress endorsed the choice made by the Non-Aligned Conference to move beyond the ideological divisions of the Cold War, which were inherently destabilizing and a constant threat to peace, development and the achievement of political and civil freedoms and rights for people of every origin.

This legacy makes the First Congress of Black Writers and Artists relevant and its celebration legitimate. It justifies the effort to take stock and identify the future challenges of our history, which must be kept in mind in the face of rampant globalization.

This Declaration draws its relevance from that rich and living heritage and is a tribute to all the participants, living and dead.

In *Culture and Colonization*, November 1956.

PRINCIPLES

At the end of the proceedings at the Sorbonne and at UNESCO Headquarters, the participants reaffirmed their commitment to:

- . the principle of fundamental human rights, of the dignity and worth of the human person, of the equal rights of men and women, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations, on 10 December 1948;
- . the principle of respect for cultural diversity and the affirmation of plural identities as vectors of freedom and creativity;
- . the principle of dialogue among cultures and civilizations based on universal values.

The participants welcomed these principles which reflect a renewed humanism.

CHALLENGES

The participants acknowledged three types of major challenges.

Social and economic challenges

- . They raised the issue of the political, social and economic regional integration of Black communities in the nations and geopolitical groupings to which they belong.
- . They also drew attention to ethnic issues within African nations.
- . The participants have taken into consideration all the initiatives aimed at the social promotion of Black communities in the current context, in particular through education.

Civilizational challenges

At the heart of these is the cultural matrix of the Black World expressed through the African presence, as a mediator of the dialogue among cultures and civilizations. The participants pledged to reflect further on the right to knowledge and relations between cultures and civilizations, with a view to promoting a pluralistic vision of the world, in particular with respect to:

- . the cultural and linguistic challenge whose importance for the acquisition of knowledge, diffusion of values, means of communication and creativity cannot be overestimated;
- . the challenge of using and sharing knowledge and science.

The participants expressed their firm commitment to combat all forms of discrimination and in particular “the doctrine of the inequality of men and races”.

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Geopolitical and geostrategic challenges

- . The participants underscored the need to control the continent’s natural resources and maritime and air spaces, in particular the critical issues of water and the environment.
- . They stressed the need for North-South and South-South cooperation in combating poverty and precarious living conditions.
- . In that regard, they recalled the imperative need for democracy and absolute respect for human rights.

RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are intended to contribute to the individual and collective flourishing of Black communities, taking into account their heritage and aspirations. Governance, culture, media and education warrant particular attention, with young people and women constituting a priority group.

With regard to governance, having noted that culture can help find solutions to questions related to governance, it is recommended:

- . that each country and group of countries draw up an inventory of the needs expressed by citizens, individually and collectively, and of cultural resources that might meet those needs in an equitable way;
- . that public authorities be called upon, in relation with civil society, to define and implement development policies and practices in a democratic framework.

With regard to culture, communication, information, the media, education, science, technology and research, it is recommended:

- . that a genuine general history be prepared of:
 - .- narrative, theatrical, oral and written literature;
 - .- the visual arts: from rock art and megalith architecture to modern times;
 - .- political and social institutions that have structured the rights and freedoms of the individual through basic laws and codes;
 - .- lastly, development, so that peoples may have at their disposal the knowledge and lessons of policy and experience, in all their diversity.
- . that the General Histories of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America, which represent well-chosen and successful initiatives undertaken by UNESCO, be popularized and updated;
- . that educational programmes be developed and made available to people in their different elements, giving all citizens the knowledge and skills that will enable them to create the democratic culture of development. Particular attention should be given

to African languages, as vectors of knowledge and communication at the subregional and regional levels;

- . that cultural and artistic events concerning Africa and the African Diaspora be held, such as the World Festival of Negro Arts (FESMAN), International African Writers' Day, and other initiatives;
- . that a closer analysis be made of the following major challenges:
 - .- the African axiological system and economic shortcomings;
 - .- African religious experiences, not only as an antidote to instrumentalization, forms of exclusiveness and cultural isolationism, but as giving meaning to humanity's presence in the universe;
 - .- forms of cultural expression in the context of the technological revolutions in information and communication;
 - .- African cultural institutions in the context of the multiplicity of structures and vectors for social integration;
 - .- culture and development in the light of the problems raised by corruption;
 - .- the Diaspora and its contribution to the establishment of strategic partnerships between Africa and the rest of the world.

With regard to young people, it is recommended:

- . that a debate and strategy be initiated for young people in the contemporary context;
- . that prominence be given to a sense of citizenship and responsibility.

With regard to women, it is recommended:

- that the rule of parity be respected in order to reaffirm their role, as major actors in development and social and political change, and as participants in all decisionmaking bodies.

Lastly, as part of the global reform of the United Nations system, the participants strongly support the programme objectives of UNESCO, an indispensable forum for the dialogue among cultures and civilizations.

At the end of the proceedings, the participants thanked all those who contributed to the success of this event, in particular the African Community of Culture (which succeeded the African Society of Culture) and the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for African and African American Research (Harvard University), initiators and organizers of this encounter, with the support of UNESCO.

Paris, 22 September 2006