

Music as a Vector for Peace

Statement made by **Mehri Madarshahi**, President of “Melody for Dialogue among Civilizations Association”

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Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear friends

It is a great honor and pleasure for me to welcome you all to this extraordinary forum where we hope to discuss an issue rarely addressed: the role and importance of music as a universal language of diplomacy and peace-making.

Looking around the table and seeing such high-level participation - and in such numbers - is most encouraging indeed. I dare say that it is proof that you all are - maybe to different degrees - believers in the power of music and its impact on peace and peaceful coexistence.

Believers that the world -having almost exhausted most other means at its disposal, requires to look above and beyond the immediate horizon and look for other means of nourishing peace and its sustainability. Your presence today, proves this belief. Thank you!

Let us then explore together today why music could be a powerful instrument of peace and resolution of conflict.

Although one can come across sporadic and periodic attempts to use music as a tool to counter confrontations and defuse conflicts, one may ask why such an approach has not yet been taken up systematically by scholars and politicians alike.

Let us then try to establish this link and begin to build such a bridge that will contribute to a more harmonious world and durable peace.

Based on our common commitment to peace, I am confident that this Forum will help foster a broader debate on the subject and will yield some action-oriented proposals for promoting this as yet under-used - and sometimes may be even misunderstood - tool which constitutes an integral element of cultural diplomacy. How can it be used and how will it be able to contribute to the prevention or resolution of conflicts, crime, injustice and discriminations and how can further appreciation of its importance be enhanced, especially in the educational context?

I referred to "cultural diplomacy". The most ancient example of diplomatic language can be found in the treaty of peace and friendship concluded between the two Kingdoms of Elba and Hamazi around 2400 B.C., discovered in the Royal Library of Elba. Among the clay-engraved messages and images researchers detected an exchange of musical instruments as a symbol of peace between warring factions.

Although this form of dialogue has been used sporadically by enlightened persons and visionaries in different cultures, but the violence of human history over the past millennia, and even today, attests to its very limited role and impact. In fact, those who emphasize harmonious relations or adherence to lofty humanitarian or cultural principles in the political sphere are often belittled or dismissed as "idealists" or "dreamers". Machiavelli stipulated that "...A prince should therefore have no other aim or thought, nor take up any other thing for his study, but war and its organization and discipline, for, that is, the only art that is necessary to one who commands..." For centuries beyond Machiavelli, the parameters of reason lost in relevance as the belief that "man is governed by forces beyond his control" prevailed. But, few - in our age - are able to step outside their prejudices and intellectual climate or have the courage to speak of different values than those prevailing in today's politics. The following examples could shed light on important actions initiated by these visionaries:

On 23 August 2005, for one memorable blip in time, Pyongyang became a city of music and hospitality, replacing ideology and hostility. For one brief night, the abstract language of music trumped the affected language of diplomacy, as harmony blanketed the everyday reality of Cold War-era animosity. For one historic night, the soothing power of music offered a glimpse of camaraderie,

as the gracious North Korean hosts revealed a softer side of a hardened Korean Workers' Party. That was nearly three years ago, when the mega pop star Cho Yong-Pil of South Korea performed at a two-hour concert in Pyongyang. Since that momentous musical contact between the two Koreas, what has transpired on the political front has been something short of breathtaking: a denuclearization accord was signed the very next month by North Korea, along with South Korea, the United States, China, Japan and Russia.

The following year, as Americans were celebrating their 4 July national independence day, North Korea sent its own congratulatory message of sorts with a seven-rocket salute into the skies above the East China Sea.

Then came along the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. The American media saw it as a diplomatic "breakthrough" - this time in Pyongyang through "sing-song diplomacy". Would the great, timeless music of Wagner, Dvorak and Gershwin played by a great American orchestra in the heart of an "evil" nation melt the hearts of the North Korean elites and public alike? Would it lead to more than just a musical interlude? As 19th century American poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote "music is the universal language of mankind," there was no translation needed when the New York Philharmonic played the opening notes of a favorite Korean folk song before the North Korean audience.

Following the historic performance, Lorin Maazel, the orchestra's music director and conductor, remarked that "in the world of music, all men and women are brothers and sisters". He added, "If [the concert] does come to be seen in retrospect as a historical moment, we will all be very proud."

Soon after the concert, the crescendo of hope and warm feelings was overtaken by an atmosphere of diminuendo. White House spokeswoman Dana Perino struck a different, if not diffident chord, when she confided to the world, "The president thinks that, at the end of the day, this is a concert. It's not necessarily going to change the behavior of a regime that has not been as forthcoming as we need them to be on their nuclear activities."

The New York Philharmonic is not the first American orchestra to participate in what some might call symphonic diplomacy. In September 1956, the Boston Symphony was the first major U.S. orchestra to visit the Soviet Union during

the Cold War, and in the fall of 1973, the Philadelphia Orchestra made an unprecedented trip to China.

In the early 1990s Daniel Barenboim together with the late Palestinian scholar Edward Said created the *East-Western Divan* (named after an anthology of poems by Goethe), an orchestra made up of young Israeli and Palestinian musicians. The orchestra has performed throughout the world and Barenboim, as part of his peace awareness efforts, has given piano recitals and music classes in Palestinian areas.

Miguel Angel Estrella, Argentinian Ambassador to UNESCO and renowned pianist, has founded *Musique Esperance*, a group seeks to promote peace and justice through music. Estrella has also formed an *Orchestra for Peace* made of young Israelis and Arab musicians. It brings together musicians from Israel, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria and the Palestinian territories. Estrella places special emphasis in empowering the young generation. As he states, "If we are able to create a new humanism, we will be more credible to our children and the youth of today."

Luis Gorelik, is a conductor of the inter-religious Argentine orchestra *Armonías* (Harmonies) made up of 34 musicians from several Argentinean provinces, He intends to incorporate musicians from other Latin American countries. He is of the belief that, many of today's political and religious leaders share a heavy responsibility. They have led the world into cycles of violence that have increased dramatically in recent times. By trying to fight fire with fire they have only succeeded in provoking a greater number of conflicts with more serious consequences. Through his work, he intends to show the possibility for cooperation among people of different religious persuasions.

Is there a place for a musical group to be a model for cooperation among people of different religions? I believe there is.

Violence and suffering are unlikely to abate unless a climate of mutual understanding, respect and cooperation can be established and fostered. It is within such a framework that efforts like the Barenboim, Estrella and Gorelik initiatives acquire a compelling peace-promoting role.

The power of music as a language of peace rests on the fact that it contains ideas: ideas, which Plato emphasizes, are more enduring, indeed more permanent than matter. Ideas can be suppressed or go underground - but unlike

any other material thing, they cannot be shattered. They can only be responded by other ideas. The language of music has a momentum of its own and it has an inner driving force that is ageless. That is why the formalized language of music for diplomacy is more needed now than ever before. We can reach a level of understanding that can eventually may lead to a less violent world. Thus far the art of dialogue through music remains in the hands of artists, poets, literary figures – in one word, intellectuals at large. But then, we witness nowadays how powerful common citizens and civil society could be in deterring destruction and violence.

The instrument that Colombian musician César López plays at anti-violence events comes from the former German Democratic Republic. Dropped from an airplane as part of a consignment of weapons smuggled to leftist guerrillas hiding in the Colombian jungle, it later fell into the hands of right-wing paramilitaries. Both groups used the AK-47 as an instrument of war. Yet, López transformed it into an instrument of peace. He came up with the idea to convert this very lethal weapon into a guitar, after having witnessed the aftermath of a bloody terrorist attack in February 2003. In the attack, attributed to the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), a car bomb at an exclusive club in Bogotá killed 36 people and injured 170.

It is only example how community experiences in the musical field can drive hope and action for an end to conflicts.

Another example in that regard is the March of a million musicians, which was organized on 15 March 2008 in Washington, D.C. by an organization called the Musicians' Alliance for Peace. This organization has sponsored over 350 concerts in 30 countries in the course of the past three 3 years.

Music and musical harmony can triumph over destruction and violence. Let us then explore examples of such efforts and endeavors at our Forum today. Let us also explore the parameters of this new vision for sustainable peace and to conclude our meeting with a set of proposals for practical actions, which could be result, oriented. Let us establish a set of “bench mark” for evaluation of the impact of these proposals. The finding of this meeting will be provided for further consideration to an international conference on music and culture, which is scheduled for March 2009, in Boston.

Thank you so much for your patience.

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