

First Alliance of Civilisations Forum 14-16 January 2008, Madrid, Spain

Background

ICMYO has been invited to suggest participants, nominated by its Organisations, to the Secretariat of the Alliance of Civilisation. Then, the Secretariat selected some of them (actually almost all of them), who were invited to attend the Forum, together with youth participants nominated by other "youth partners", such as the Islamic Conference Youth Forum, the Commonwealth Youth Programme, UNESCO and the Council of Europe. Apart from the participants selected, ICMYO also appointed me as its representative at the Forum.

Youth in the Agenda of the Forum

Apart from one Working Session (2 hours) in the official Agenda of the Forum, there was an "Orientation" session for youth participants which took place the day before the official opening of the Forum. At this session, each of the youth partners had a 5-minutes presentation. I did that presentation on behalf of ICMYO. After these short presentations, there was a working session on Media: Amplifying Youth Voices for the Alliance of Civilisations. Several speakers - all of them chosen by the Secretariat of the Alliance of Civilisations, none of them representing youth organisations, and all of them North Americans - made their presentations first and facilitated the discussions in small groups afterwards. At the end of the working session, President Jorge Sampaio, High Representative of the United Nations for the Alliance of Civilisations, addressed the youth group. The working session on Youth Approaches to Intercultural and Inter-religious dialogue followed the same model.

Evaluation

In my personal opinion, the Forum was badly-organised since the beginning. The selection of the "youth partners" reveals a complete lack of criteria that led to the fact that you-led organisations representing young people were mixed with inter-governmental organisations from various kinds. Even the selection of the youth-led organisations was weird (ICMYO put at the same level as the ICYF). This mixed selection of "youth partners" was also reflected in the composition of the youth group: young people representing big, world-wide youth organisations, was put together with young people representing national youth councils, grass-root organisations and even young people who nobody seemed to understand where they had come from. The contents of the debates were totally random and not necessarily connected to the expectations of the participants. The methods for the debates were totally inadequate, and the fact that the speakers selected represented very specific experiences not connected at all to those of the vast majority of participants, made the sessions look like a preaching exercise rather than an exchange of ideas aimed at any kind of conclusions. Many participants, including the ones selected by ICMYO, were quite disappointed.

Follow-up

The so-called “youth partners” agreed, together with the Secretariat of the Alliance of Civilisations, on the need to further discuss their role in the process and on how to enhance the participation of youth in the Alliance of Civilisations.

As I wasn’t mandated by ICMYO for that, I agreed to attend this meeting on behalf of the European Youth Forum only. I will however try to promote the role of ICMYO and its organisations in the process. The meeting will take place in Istanbul, on 29 February.

I will report back to ICMYO after that meeting.

Diogo Pinto
Secretary General
European Youth Forum