



Opening ceremony

Thursday, April the 2nd, 14.30

As Master of Ceremonies, **Pascal Vrebos**, a Belgian journalist, welcomed the guests and expressed his appreciation for the high profile attendance at the colloquium, in which representatives, including Ministers, of numerous African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) and European Union (EU) countries as well as over 150 art professionals were present. He underlined the symbolic and practical importance of this international gathering for a renewed and strengthened dialogue among ACP and EU countries on culture and to highlight the role of cultural industries in development.

As Minister for Development Cooperation of the host country, **Charles Michel** gave a welcoming speech during which he stressed the importance of culture in building up a country's identity: "*cultural heritage is a brilliant tool for development*"¹, he said. Recognition of a country's own cultural identity is the basis for its true integration in the global economy. Likewise, in development cooperation donor countries should at all times respect their partner countries' cultural identities, and ensure the latter's ownership of development.

Charles Michel particularly addressed the ACP countries in highlighting their richness in all creative fields, which renders their cultural expressions highly appealing to young people all around the world. Therefore, the EU and its member states should show flexibility in the access and promotion of ACP cultural services to and in the EU market.

Introduced by Pascal Vrebos as a "militant of cultural development", **José Rafael Lantigua**, Minister of Culture for the Dominican Republic and President of the Culture Commission of the ACP Group of States, confirmed the importance of a strong cultural identity in a globalised world. He considered culture as "the last frontier to know and transform structures that generate poverty in our societies [...and as a tool to help] reduce the great inequalities that prevail in most of our countries"², thus illustrating the role of culture in reducing poverty and realising the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Culture can be considered an aspect of a country's social capital and, as such, cultural expression can provide an alternative way towards social inclusion. In the context of the current financial crisis, "culture is one of the fundamental ways to confront the current situation of economic insecurity and of the worsening of the social crisis"³.

¹ Original in French "[Votre] patrimoine culturel est un formidable outil de développement".

² Original in Spanish "la última frontera para conocer y transformar las estructuras que generan la condición de pobreza en nuestras sociedades [...] y como un medio para ayudar] a reducir las grandes desigualdades que imperan en la mayoría de nuestros países".

³ Original in Spanish "una de las vías fundamentales para enfrentar la actual situación de inseguridad económica y de agravamiento de la crisis social".

The Minister called for the strengthening of creative processes through South-South cooperation in order to increase and deepen cultural exchanges, which will in turn intensify and favour dialogue between peoples and cultures, and also the promotion of peace. While appreciating the EU's effort in linking culture to development and in supporting the ACP cultural industry, he stressed the need to establish greater synergies among governments, the private sector and civil society actors. Incentives for culture should aim, amongst others, at curbing the digital gap, building up solid cultural industries and allow for wider market access for ACP cultural services.

Representing the EU presidency, **Jan Kohout**, deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, stated that culture plays an essential role at different levels: in the construction of a nation state, in keeping social stability within a country, in creating harmony among and within regions, and in fostering respect for each other. While the Czech presidency's priorities have been defined and focus on the economic crisis and on good governance, the deputy Minister asserted that it is ready to take on board the “*qualitative contribution*” of culture during the current year of creativity and innovation.

Highlighting the importance of preserving cultural diversity, Jan Kohout acknowledged the positive difference individual artists can make at a local level. On the assumption that culture can give a meaningful contribution to a knowledge-based economy and to development, he called for the promotion of mobility among art professionals, the establishment of enduring links among academic and research centres, and encouraging creative industries in developing countries.

Presented as the “soldier of democracy”, **Amadou Toumani Touré**, President of the Republic of Mali, expressed his gratitude to the EU for organising this conference, which represents an opportunity to bring about a joint vision on cultural challenges and their solutions. The President of Mali deems culture to be very important for his country: in fact, culture features in the Country Strategy Paper as one of the main priorities for the 4th time. In the recently signed Financing Agreement within the framework of the 10th EDF, culture was allocated a budget of 5 million Euros.

“Culture is the light that shines on our path towards economic, social and technical progress”⁴ he stated. That is particularly true for the African continent, where oral tales and legends are a tool to pass on knowledge among different generations, as said in the famous sentence by Amadou Hampaté Ba quoted by the President: “In Africa, when an old person dies, it is like a whole library is being burned”⁵. In Mali, culture and oral traditions are a way to mediate and ease tensions that may arise among people of different sexes, religions, ages, etc. He made reference to various cultural events and festivals in Mali as well as in the region that proved successful in increasing social cohesion among residents and Diaspora members. He highlighted the importance of such events, as development should aim at “satisfying not only material needs, but also

⁴ Original in French “la culture reste la lumière qui éclaire notre marche vers le progrès économique, social, scientifique et technique”.

⁵ Original in French “En Afrique, lorsqu'un vieillard meurt, c'est une bibliothèque qui brûle”.

intangible assets that are the values that we take from Culture and Education⁶". As the Malian proverb says: "When you do not know where you come from, you can never know where you are going"⁷.

Louis Michel, the European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, stated that through this Colloquium a place for dialogue with policy makers and culture experts has been created. For too long the fact that culture forms an integral part of development has been overlooked, with culture even dismissed as an obstacle to it: Commissioner Michel fiercely opposed this view declaring that "culture is the sphere where society expresses its link to the world and projects its future"⁸. While praising the potential value of cultural identity, he warned against negative uses of culture which may lead to situations of conflict, especially in these times of crises.

Commissioner Michel asserted the "universal dimension" of culture, just as "the fight for freedom and democracy is a universal fight". The latter cannot, in fact, be achieved without attention to education and culture. Not only did he commend artists as democracy creators and defenders, but he underlined the contribution of culture to national economies of both ACP and EU countries. While stressing the responsibility of each ACP country "to define the place of culture in your vision of development and action programme"⁹, he recalled the strong commitment of the EU to encourage cultural diversity. On an international scale the EU fervently backed the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection of Diversity of Cultural Expressions, while on a bilateral level the EU is currently financing cultural projects in 14 ACP countries. Despite this, donors and partner countries still need a more in-depth change in the way culture is perceived in international cooperation and in the economy. The commissioner concluded that "only culture where both identity and difference are present can contribute, can activate, the perfectibility of every human being"¹⁰.

⁶ Original in French "nous ne pouvons nous confiner seulement à la satisfaction de nos besoins matériels. Nous avons tout aussi besoin de bien immatériels que sont les valeurs que nous tirons de la Culture et de l'Education".

⁷ Original in French "si tu ne sais pas d'où tu viens, tu ne sauras jamais où tu vas".

⁸ Original in French "[C'est] une sphère dans laquelle la société exprime son rapport au monde, et projette son devenir".

⁹ Original in French "[C'est à vous] d'élaborer le contrat social qui rassemble et mobilise votre population autour d'une vision du développement et d'un programme d'action"

¹⁰ Original in French "Seule une culture où sont présentes à la fois l'identité et la différence, peut contribuer, peut mobiliser, peut activer, ce en quoi je crois depuis toujours: la perfectibilité de tout être humain"