



Leaders stress conflict resolution on first day of 5th Global Forum

Speakers at the opening of the 5th Global Forum of the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations all emphasized conflict resolution using Syria as an example on Tuesday, Feb. 27, 2013.

Under the sparkling chandeliers of the Hofburg Palace in Vienna, world leaders and other participants are meeting to discuss ways to further the goals of the UNAOC while encouraging more responsible leadership.

The foreign minister of Austria Michael Spindelegger opened the session by stressing how his country's tradition of wanting a dialogue matches the goals of the UNAOC. That theme was later elaborated on by the country's Federal President Heinz Fischer.

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon spoke about conflict resolution, job creation and specific troubles going on around the globe.

"In too many places, anti-Muslim sentiment has become commonplace," Ban Ki-moon said. "Migrants from all backgrounds are vilified instead of embraced. When such attitudes are left unchallenged, racists feel empowered."

He spoke at length about Syria, describing it as a "mosaic of tribes, religion, culture and traditions." Later, during a press conference, he blamed the language of hatred for creating a divide in the world.

Perhaps the most lively of the opening speakers was Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan. He urged world leaders to remember 70,000 people have been killed in Syria so far and change is necessary.

His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, emir of Qatar, described the need for political and popular will in order to have a culture based on respect and diversity. He also called for a more responsible media environment.

In the afternoon, participants of the forum rotated between workshops focusing on the topics of the forum: religion, media and migration.



During a workshop titled “New Narrative on Migration” participants recommended the addition of a youth member on future migration panels and for the narrative on migration to include the benefits of migration for migrants themselves.

In the workshop “Living together at ease in a landscape of religious diversity and differences” the discussion included human rights and how to use human rights to work toward a more tolerant society.

The activities at Hofburg palace closed with the Plural+ Youth Video Festival. Plural+ is a project that highlights videos from around the world made by young people. The videos chosen at the forum came from Austria specifically and focus on the topics of migration and integration.

The winner of the Plural+ Project for ages 9-14 was a video about a magic book that can break barriers between cultures. For ages 15-18 the winner was a film called “Breakout”; for ages 19-25 it was a film called “Silent Movie”; and winner in the category of most dedicated was a film called “Get Together.”

The day ended with dinner in an opulent ballroom inside the Vienna City Hall.

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