

**DECLARATION
FOR SHARED SOCIETIES:**
Statement of Commitment,
Vision, Rationale, Principles
and Assumptions



**The
Shared
Societies
Project**

**Democratic Leadership
for Dialogue, Diversity &
Social Cohesion**

Building a World Safe for Difference

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT To Build Shared Societies

We, the members of the Club of Madrid, make a commitment to work for the building of shared societies throughout the world.

We have considered the lessons and insights that can be learnt from experience in our own and other countries, and from the work of leading thinkers and policy makers, and are convinced that these lessons and insights indicate possible and effective strategies for promoting and maintaining respect for diversity and enhanced social inclusion and cohesion.

We have created a set of materials based on the experiences, lessons and insights we have collected, that can facilitate the process of building societies for all, and in which everyone can play a full and active part.

The main components of this Portfolio of Policies and Practices for a Shared Society are:

- A rationale for giving priority to building Shared Societies
- A statement of the vision of a Shared Society
- A set of principles on which a Shared Society is based
- Ten Commitments leaders can make, covering ten areas of policy and social life central to creating a Shared Society
- Examples of approaches and methods of meeting those Commitments which have been implemented in different countries and contexts around the world

We offer these proposals aware that they need to be adapted to local contexts and their unique circumstances. We do not believe that we can be prescriptive about the approaches to be used in specific situations, but we are clear that these are issues that cannot be avoided and challenges which must be met if a prosperous, stable, Shared Society is to be a reality.

We also know that maintaining a Shared Society is a continuous, ongoing process because even the most inclusive, cohesive society will have to adapt to growing diversity, social change and new challenges. In these circumstances one of the greatest threats is to assume complacently that previous tried and tested approaches will work again in these new circumstances.

We call on all leaders around the world to commit to this Statement - which will inform other initiatives and developments - so that there will be a common identification with these principles and strategies in the international community.

IT IS URGENT

- We make this commitment and this call because we believe that the failure to achieve shared societies is one of the greatest challenges to the world community today.
- The world is increasingly diverse and its peoples increasingly intertwined, as a result of globalisation and population movements. Ninety percent (90%) of the countries of the world have at least a ten percent (10%) minority population.
- We acknowledge the pernicious effect of discrimination and prejudice that lead to social exclusion.

We recognise the threats to the world that are created by the existence in many countries of socially acceptable, habitualised or institutionalised social, economic and political exclusion on the basis of race, ethnicity, religion, culture, language or other signs of difference.

Tensions are growing and new forms of hostilities are emerging in many parts of the world, often related to new challenges such as climate change and energy, food and economic crises.

AN ACHIEVABLE GOAL – AND AS URGENT NOW AS EVER

- Social cohesion is an attainable goal and has been achieved in many societies past and present.
- Policies directed at embracing diversity and cultural identities have a particularly crucial part to play in societies threatened by these crises or by social disintegration – or the interaction between them, as they often feed on one another. While some might argue that such threats are a reason to postpone efforts to build social cohesion we are confident that the opposite is the case and that these threats are a reason to redouble efforts to create integrated and socially cohesive societies.
- The Club of Madrid and the leaders who are its members are committed to collecting and sharing information and counsel with regard to how leaders and societies achieve social cohesion and shared societies.

IT IS A MORAL IMPERATIVE

- We know that governments that fail to create opportunities for all sections of society to maximise their capacities and fulfil their full potential are neglecting their responsibilities to the people.
- Members of society should not be penalised because their ways and their values are different from those of the more powerful sections of society.
- At the same time all members of society, while expressing their own identity and aspirations, are expected also to do so in ways that accept the dignity and established human rights of others with different ideas and attitudes. No section of society, either the majority or the minority, can expect to have license to act in any way it likes, ignoring others and their basic rights.

SHARED SOCIETIES MAKE ECONOMIC SENSE

- We recognise the benefits of a socially cohesive society that maximises the contribution, creativity and talents of all its members and embraces diversity as strength.
- If some people are marginalised, their contribution, skills and talents are lost to society.
- We are aware of the tremendous costs, human and material, inflicted on a society that does exclude groups - sometimes to the point of fuelling violent conflict.
- We do not believe that a security led response is an effective and efficient response to social division and intercommunity tension. Increased expenditure on security services in these circumstances is costly in human and financial terms and perpetuates the divisions, compared to strategies that provide opportunities and encouragement for all sections of the community to participate as equals in the social, political and economic life, benefits and responsibilities of the state.
- Evidence shows that a diverse society where there is social trust and participation is economically more prosperous than a divided society where some are marginalised. It is also more prosperous than a homogeneous society.

IT IS NECESSARY: THERE IS NO ALTERNATIVE

- We believe that a socially cohesive society is essential to allow individuals and identity groups to develop and contribute fully to their society.
- Some leaders despair that nothing can be done and they respond to divisions by ignoring or avoiding them, or they attempt to suppress dissent and opposition. They need to see that there is a better way.
- History and experience shows that the only effective, sustainable and morally acceptable way to manage social tensions between sections of society is to work to create a shared society in which all sections of that society feel at home and valued for themselves.

IT IS A GLOBAL ISSUE

- Not only do individual leaders need to take responsibility for divisions in their society but we call on world leaders to challenge their peers and colleagues, including their allies, to do the same.
- When political leaders act in ways that exploit fears and prejudices based on differences and insecurities among their constituents, deepen divisions and deny the basic principles on which shared societies are based, it is essential that their peers, and leaders of regional and international bodies, call on them to stop.
- When leaders manipulate division and others fail to demand change, the result is built up frustrations and resentments that may not be controllable.

IT IS TIMELY

- We welcome the signs that many agencies and leaders are recognising the importance of building shared societies.
- The UN Commission on Social Development has identified social integration as its priority for 2009-2010.
- The European Union designated 2008 as the Year of Intercultural Dialogue and 2010 as the Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.
- The Office of the UN Commissioner on Human Rights organised in 2009 a Review Conference on the Durban Declaration against Racism and Discrimination.
- Many other initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals emphasise the importance of combating inequality and poverty and are inextricably linked to building shared societies.
- But we are also concerned that many declarations and programmes to encourage social cohesion have been limited in their application and have often met with implicit and explicit resistance from leaders and communities.

IT IS A RESPONSIBILITY OF LEADERSHIP

- We recognise that progress requires governments and leaders to identify social cohesion as a priority facing modern society and the global community.
- We believe that while governments and political leaders must provide leadership, there is also an important role for civil society, which is itself strengthened by the growth of social cohesion.
- We therefore make this call to leaders to take action to build shared societies.

VISION OF A SHARED SOCIETY

Socially Cohesive or “Shared Societies” are stable, safe and just, and are based on the promotion and protection of all human rights, as well as on non-discrimination, tolerance, respect for diversity, equality of opportunity, solidarity, security and participation of all people including disadvantaged and vulnerable groups and persons.

A Shared Society is at ease with itself and the diversity of its members’ cultural, religious and ethnic identities. It recognises and values these identities and their interdependence as strengths, working creatively with each other and with the wider global community to solve common problems and to promote respect for human dignity and release human potential.

We identify four key elements which are necessary ingredients if individuals or groups are to feel that they have a place in society:

- Democratic participation– the opportunity to take part in decision- making and the capacity and skills to do so effectively.
- Respect for diversity and the dignity of the individual– recognition of the value of difference and diversity in society. This means accepting (though not necessarily agreeing with) individuals’ and groups’ original and chosen identities, values and aspirations, and their chosen representatives. Respecting the dignity of others includes sensitivity to their feelings and avoidance of hate speech but we do not believe that this extends to restricting the expression of differences of opinion and critical comments even if on occasions this can cause offence.
- Equality of opportunity– equal access to economic and material resources and facilitation of social mobility, ensuring that individuals and communities have the capacity to take advantage of that access in order to satisfy their social, physical and economic needs and also play an active part in the social and economic development of the society.
- Protection from discrimination– mechanisms and forms of redress if the individual and his or her community are discriminated against or otherwise deprived of their rights and opportunities to play a full part in society.

RATIONALE FOR A SHARED SOCIETY

Social exclusion and mismanagement of diversity within societies are among the major challenges facing the world today because they create enormous threats to the stability of our world and consume enormous resources in dealing with the consequences of inequality and exclusion, which include war, violence, community breakdown and alienation. Our failure to co-operate in managing the world's resources, locally and globally, leads to natural disasters and destruction of the environment.

How nations and communities, individually and collectively, approach the issues of social cohesion and cultural diversity will have implications for political and economic development, human security, social stability, and peace throughout the 21st century and beyond.

More than ninety percent of all nations in existence today have a minority population of at least ten percent and current trends of economic mobility, displacement and globalisation will increase the levels of diversity across the world. The failure to proactively and positively manage diversity has the potential to produce substantial negative consequences.

We believe that averting ethnic, religious and cultural conflict in and among communities and nations is an urgent priority for many cities and states. We believe that societies are most likely to be peaceful, democratic and prosperous when leaders and citizens recognise the value of diversity and actively develop means to work together to build a shared society based on a set of shared goals and common values.

We believe a socially cohesive society will be more stable and productive. Its members will be positive and confident of their role in society and their talents and contributions will be recognised, nurtured and applied in the further development of the society and the global community. The well-being of individuals and communities leads to the well-being of the nation, and among nations.

PRINCIPLES AND ASSUMPTIONS

Underlying Effective Approaches to Building Shared Societies

Our approach to building Shared Societies is guided by a set of principles and underlying assumptions based on experience and observation of our own and other socio-political systems.

When states recognise the need to take steps to deal with social division and social exclusion, and to manage diversity, they normally attempt to create either a homogeneous society or a pluralist society.

Experience suggest that seeking homogeneity where it does not naturally exist creates disintegrative tendencies and reinforces resistance and negative reactions to difference, while recognising pluralism has integrative tendencies that promote social cohesion and build respect for difference.

Secondly, we recognise that the processes of implementing any policy or programme are complex. The problems of social conflict and the absence of social cohesion are the result of many factors, and as such they require multiple approaches balancing and complementing each other to build a critical mass of energy and influence, and policy and practice, that can enhance the achievement of a cohesive society. Moreover, initiatives may have both positive and negative impacts and consequences. We therefore do not set out a model on how to achieve social cohesion but principles that should be followed and we suggest specific steps which need to be adapted to local circumstances.

Thirdly, the most direct threats to a national framework for coexistence and social cohesion are not interpersonal but institutional: the exclusion of groups from the economic life of a country; the proscription of cultural expressions such as customs or language; inequalities and inequitable treatment related to identity; or the lack of representation or participation at all levels of governance and in the social networks. Addressing all these institutional issues is essential to the shared ownership of a national project for societal development.

Consequently and finally, we believe that political and government leaders play the key part in efforts to promote social cohesion.

“We really have no other alternative.

**We either learn to get along and respect one another
—and not define each other by negative reference—
while celebrating our diversity, or we are finished.”**

Bill Clinton
Former President, United States of America
Honorary Co-Chair, Club of Madrid

On the basis of these four assumptions we are guided by the following principles:

- It is a central responsibility of government and policy makers to ensure that policies have a positive effect on social cohesion; it cannot be left to natural processes of cohesion or the expectation that civil society will solve problems, though they have an important contribution to make.
- Responsibility for social inclusion and cohesion must be clearly located within formal government structures.
- Respect is crucial in order for individuals and communities to feel included and accepted in society. They need to feel that their dignity, values, needs, interests and aspirations are respected even if they cannot always be realized.
- People need to have a sense that they are involved in a common project that is relevant to them and their interests.
- People have to feel that the groups that they belong too are recognized and that they and their community have the opportunity to be involved in their government's and society's decision-making, even if they do not take up the opportunities.
- Concerns and issues that cause division and hostility must be addressed directly.
- People have to feel that they can pursue their personal goals even if they are not necessarily satisfied.

By their own actions and policies leaders can show their willingness to respect and interact with those with different backgrounds and their commitment to fair and equal treatment for all. They can also create conditions that encourage others to respect diversity and build shared societies.

The nature of the interaction between leaders and the community is crucial in managing issues of social diversity. Shared Societies are achieved when all parts of a community value and feel committed to their shared achievements. The most effective way is through a partnership between the state and political leaders, civil society, religious institutions and the private sector.

We recognise that many leaders will be under pressure to support chauvinistic, sectional interests. Those leaders will need support in challenging divisive tendencies. Otherwise they can easily become captured by and dependent on those interests. We also recognise that some leaders are self-serving and corrupt and that some states are authoritarian and oppressive. These leaders may wish to ignore concerns about building a shared society. In these situations, there is a responsibility on other leaders to challenge such attitudes and practices and show that ultimately an inclusive approach will lead to benefits for all. In this respect the Ten Commitments are a practical, non-judgemental way to help leaders to assess their current policies and their likely impact, and to think about possible new policies and practices and their implementation.



The Club of Madrid is an independent organization dedicated to strengthening democracy around the world by drawing on the unique experience and resources of its Members - more than 70 democratically elected former Presidents and Prime Ministers from more than 50 countries. In partnership with other organizations and governments that share its democracy-promotion goals, the Club of Madrid provides peer to peer counsel, strategic support and technical advice to leaders and institutions working towards democratic transition and consolidation.

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