



The Club de Madrid is marking International Day of Cultural Diversity, celebrated worldwide today (on May 21), by inviting world leaders to support its Call for Action on Leadership for Shared Societies. This Call to Action urges them to intensify efforts at the national and local level to ensure that social cohesion and shared societies become a key priority in how they lead and govern.

Cultural Diversity is a fact of life today, whether we embrace it or resist it. Ninety percent of the countries of the world have minority populations of at least ten percent and of course many countries have much more diverse populations.

We are clear that embracing cultural diversity is the only option. The Club de Madrid is itself culturally diverse —our members, 72 former Presidents and Prime Ministers from 51 countries, come from all continents and are from many religious, language and ethnic backgrounds. Our 51 home countries – including the United States, Ireland, Bosnia & Herzegovina, France, Brazil, Mauritius, New Zealand, Sudan, Sri Lanka – are diverse. As leaders we struggled to build shared societies both and ensure that cultural diversity was embraced. Sometimes we succeeded; sometimes we failed. Leaders face strong pressures to recognise only one culture and to ignore, deny, or even marginalise others.

We know that to deny a community's cultural identity only creates problems. It leads to injustice as people are deprived of the opportunity to fulfil their potential. Their contribution to the wider community is lost. Finally, tension and mutual hostility arise which are costly and wasteful to manage.

It is not easy to work to build shared societies and as leaders we realised that we would have appreciated help and support in countering pressures to favour one community over another. We also know that cultural groups are sometimes pushed to the margins and discriminated against without anyone realising it is happening. This is why we wanted to help leaders to identify such occurrences and take steps to redress them.

As a result we created our Shared Societies Project in 2007 - dedicated to promoting leadership for social cohesion. We have initiated dialogue meetings to explore issues arising in various parts of the world – Democratic Dialogue and Freedom of Association in the Middle East and North Africa; Religion, Democratic Leadership and Intercultural Dialogue; and Women's Political Participation and Leadership.

We have also been identifying what is required to create a shared society, have formulated our vision of this type of society and stated the principles on which such a society needs to be based: Respect for the dignity and human rights of the other; equality of opportunity and treatment; absence of discrimination and opportunities for democratic participation by all.


We have gone farther and identified Ten Commitments or ten areas of policy to which societies and leaders need to commit if they are to achieve a shared society. They can be used for assessing where countries, cities or local communities have been effective and those gaps that still need to be addressed. Most societies have acted on some of them but they are all important and together create a balanced approach that will lead to societies where all cultures can find a place.

While cultural diversity is valued, some cultural practices may be unacceptable because they attempt to impose restrictions on individuals' expression of a different identity. The Ten Commitments also help here because the standards that they set out apply to all the cultures in a society. Both the majority and the minority are responsible for respecting the other.

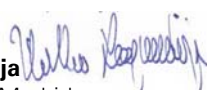
The Club de Madrid, in association with the City of Rotterdam, organised the first Global Forum on Leadership for Shared Societies in Rotterdam, Netherlands, on 13-14 November 2008. At its conclusion the members of the Club issued the Call to Action and we are now inviting leaders worldwide to endorse the Call and work to ensure that cultural diversity is a positive and valued part of shared societies around the world. There is no better day for leaders worldwide to sign on than today, as we celebrate the International Day of Cultural Diversity.

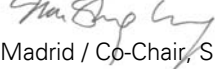
Signed:

Ricardo Lagos 
President, Club of Madrid
Former President, Chile

Mary Robinson 
Vice-President, Club of Madrid
Former President, Ireland

Lionel Jospin
Member, Club of Madrid
Former Prime Minister,
France

Zlatko Lagumdžija 
Member, Club of Madrid
Former Prime Minister,
Bosnia & Herzegovina

Jennifer Shipley 
Member of Club of Madrid / Co-Chair, Shared
Societies Project
Former Prime Minister, New Zealand