

Views on World Summit, 2009

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The 4th World Summit Stresses ‘Culture’ in ‘Development’, Israel on the Spot



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A South African judge of the constitutional court sits with a British baroness, a Jamaican minister for culture, a Palestinian rights activist, a Slovenian university professor-cum secretary of state for culture and a Kenyan arts manager as a South African jazz musician presides over the meeting as master of ceremonies. Where could such a place be?

Welcome to the 4th World Summit on Arts & Culture (September 22-25, 2009) that attracted some 450 delegates from across the world to deliberate on issues related to the creative and cultural sectors and how they—depending on who and what they are used for—can be instruments for inter-cultural dialogue or root of all conflict.

In her remarks that officially opened the summit on September 23, Lulama ‘Lulu’ Xingwana, the South African Minister for Arts and Culture, said culture and the arts “lay the foundations for mutual understanding, for celebrations of difference and diversity, as well as preparing the ground for working towards commonalities and coalescence.”

The first key note speaker at the Summit was Baroness Lola Young, the Chair of the Commonwealth Group on Culture and Development.

Saying culture is—and has been—the missing link in development, Baroness Lola Young called for culture and development to be integrated. “Governments, development organisations and donors are failing to engage with a crucial component of development by ignoring culture,” she said. “The lack of inclusion of cultural components in development strategies can hamper human development.”

Baroness Lola Young appealed to governments, development agencies, civil society and donors to “adopt long term strategies to take account of culture. This means coming up with indicators that measure cultural well-being as a development end in itself. It also means finding new ways of quantifying and measuring the impact that support for cultural expression can have. Above all, these strategies must be backed up with financial commitment and political will.”

According to the baroness, whose Culture Programme was established in 2005, culture can be used in key areas of development, such as economic growth, policy, expression, identity and in human rights.

Held in Museum Africa in Newtown, Johannesburg, on the theme ‘Meeting of Cultures: Creating Meaning through the Arts’, some 450 delegates from 70 nations across the world attended the 4th World Summit on Arts & Culture that—for the first time—was held in Africa. Two hundred and fifty delegates from 29 African countries attended the meeting. Though there were murmurs on exclusion from the creatives in South Africa, Mike Van Graan, the World Summit programme director, said 60 artists attended the meeting in their capacity as ‘artists’.



Some awkward moments were also exhibited at the summit as one panelist, Iman Aoun, transformed the cultural platform into a political one. As she attacked Israel without restraint, many could be seen fidgeting in their seats in the cavernous conference room on the fourth level of Museum Africa.

We interviewed Iman Aoun after her presentation:

Why are you calling for the cultural boycott of Israel?

Aoun: We are calling for both cultural and economic sanctions to be imposed on Israel. Israel has occupied our territory over the past 61 years. We are being imprisoned in concentration camps in a similar manner the Red Indian were in the USA even in the UN-recognised Palestinian territories of West Bank and Gaza Strip. And no one is stopping Israel. Is Israel, that is committing crimes against humanity, above the law?

So what do you suggest the creative and cultural sector should do?

Aoun: They should use the platform to champion the Palestinian cause. The West, especially the UK that is trying to police the Middle East through Israel, is to blame.



In your presentation you accused development partners of steering clear of politics as they tackle issues of little relevance—HIV/AIDS, breastfeeding—to the Palestinian Question. Would you care to elaborate on this?

Aoun: Yes, they are not putting pressure on Israel. Is it because the Whites are controlling the world? All big businesses—banks, the film industry—are controlled by Jews. And these are to the benefit of the Whites. We are, however, not blaming Jews but the Zionist movement. We must fight Zionists who are colonizing us.

Do you think the Palestinian Question will be sorted out in your life time?

Aoun: No, I don't see the world perception changing. Even here at the World Summit with more than 400 delegates you could see how uneasy they got when I broached the subject; they appeared quite scared.

But isn't it axiomatic that the culture of the economically and politically powerful becomes the dominant culture?

Aoun: Israel is not only dehumanising Palestinians but is also stealing our cultural symbols as well. They began by taking away claiming that Falafel, a Palestinian food, is Israeli when it isn't. Then they are appropriating our embroidery and the symbol of the cactus as their own.

However, the 4th World Summit on Arts & Culture concluded well on a philosophical note with judge Albie Sachs of the South African Constitutional Court and Sanjoy Roy from the Jaipur Literature festival speaking on 'Saving the arts, so the arts can save the world'.

The 4th World Summit was hosted by the National Arts Council of South Africa (NAC) and the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA).

Annabell Lebethe, CEO of the NAC said, "The caliber of presentations, level of debate and networks formed speak to what is emerging as a successful event. In hosting the event, the NAC and partners has enabled an influential platform for profiling African thought leadership in arts and culture".

Brenda Madumise, NAC Chairperson stated, "We regard the hosting of the World Summit as a landmark accomplishment for South Africa's arts sector. It is in understanding the impact and then catalyzing the process of evolution that we will see the tangible benefit".

The Summit Programme Director Mike van Graan urged all delegates, cultural workers, arts practitioners, the media and other stakeholders to recognize that the Summit is not a destination but a milestone in a process towards the betterment of the Arts sector in South Africa.

By the end of the four days of the Summit, 57 speakers had presented their views to and debated them with arts practitioners, policy makers and funders from across the globe on the place of the arts in contemporary society and the contribution that creativity makes towards the growth of global culture.

Then it was time to announce the next Summit and the outgoing Chair of the International Federation of Arts Councils and Culture Agencies (IFACCA), Risto Ruohonen, Director of the Finnish National Gallery, did not hesitate in announcing the Australia Council for the Arts as the successful bidder for the 5th World Summit.

Kathy Keele, CEO of the Australia Council for the Arts, welcomed all delegates to the next World Summit in Melbourne. She presented a video featuring endorsements by the Federal Arts Minister, Peter Garrett AM, actor Cate Blanchett and other arts leaders, celebrating how the arts intersect with and express the voice of communities across Australia.

The 5th World Summit will be held on October 3-6, 2011, on the eve of the Melbourne International Arts Festival and in partnership with Arts Victoria. Australia was a founding member of IFACCA and the 2011 Summit marks the Federation's 10 year anniversary.

The 5th Summit's theme of 'Creative Intersections' highlights the current global interest in how the arts can give voice to different communities and concerns, through

collaborations with business and the economy, new technologies, health and wellbeing, the environment, education and identity through Indigenous, local and global cultures.

“Australia is a recognised leader in the diverse and energetic ways the arts now intersect with many different sectors and peoples,” said CEO Keele. “Our arts are giving voice to health and environmental messages, to community building and multicultural expression, to a new interchange with our business world, and of course to the continuity of our Indigenous cultures. The engagement of Australian artists with these now urgent issues, local and globally, is at the heart of our successful bid to host this world summit.”

The Australia Council won a competitive bid process among the IFACCA’s national members from 61 countries. The Australian Summit is likely to attract over 500 key people from arts funding agencies and cultural organisations from around the world. The impact of arts and culture policies will be explored, with many delegates expected to bring to the 2011 Summit a specific interest in the Asia-Pacific region.

The first World Summit, hosted by the Canada Council for the Arts, was held in Ottawa in 2000. The second Summit was held in Singapore in 2003, the third Summit was held in Newcastle Gateshead in 2006 and the fourth Summit was held in Johannesburg in 2009.

“IFACCA’s World Summits bring together the world’s leaders in arts policy,” said Sarah Gardner, founding Executive Director of IFACCA, which is based in Sydney. “The Summit provides a unique opportunity to learn about good practice, build new networks and initiate projects and research to support artists and the arts at the national and global level.”