

IMPORTANT POINTS TO NOTES ON AFRO-ARAB CULTURAL RENAISSANCE: ROLE OF THE PARLIAMENTS.

INTRODUCTORY BACKGROUND

Contacts between Black Africa and the Arab world date back at least 2000 years of our era. The Arab world mentioned here consists of twenty-one countries. Its population is estimated at 337 million people. Geographically, the Arab world stretches for thousands of kilometers. It is bordered by the Mediterranean Sea, Sahara and the Taurus mountain range, Kurdistan and western Iran. A part of the Arab world is African and it is composed of seven Nile and the Maghreb countries, hence, forming a link and a basis for cooperation between the continent and the Arab world.

Afro-Arab relations:

African presence in the Arab World

The African blacks were yet going in Asia as slaves in the pre-Islamic period. However, the black Africans did not arrive in Asia only as slaves, but also as conquerors. At the time of the Prophet Muhammad, the city of Mecca had a mercenary army of Ethiopians, other sub Saharan Africans and Arab nomads to protect its caravan routes to escort important families of the city.

Arab presence in Africa

As noted above, since the fifth and sixth centuries, Arabia and Ethiopia maintained very close relationships. The Prophet Muhammad himself often advised some of his most faithful followers he wanted to protect, to seek refuge in Ethiopia in order to escape the persecution of the pagans of Mecca. However, the penetration of Arabs in Africa had to wait until the death of Prophet Muhammad in 632. Ten years later, the Arabs were present in the most important cities of the East.

Damascus was conquered in 636, Jerusalem in 638 and Alexandria in 642. From 679, the Arabs arrived in Libya and Tunisia, and in the tenth century, the Arabization of the Maghreb had considerably progressed. Then a general thrust began to southbound, from Egypt, Libya and North Africa.

It is on the twelfth century that was founded the Muslim kingdom of Kanem.

The reasons of Arab penetration in Africa

One of the reasons was certainly the desire of spreading the Muslim religion, but it was not the only one. The Arab world with the exception of Egypt, which was a farm land, consisted largely of nomadic groups organized to engage in trade over long distances and at a large scale. This business was focusing on gold, largely from the Upper Senegal and the Ashanti region, leading providers of the Roman Empire, the medieval Europe, the ancient East and the Arab world until the discovery of America. The ivory, gum and slaves were also among the exports. In return, black Africa was importing medicines, perfumes, dates, salt, clothes, horses, copper, iron bars and guns.

Results of Afro-Arab contacts

Religious and cultural affinities

One of the most sustainable results of the first contacts between the Arabs and Africans was the spread of Islam in Africa. Colonialism did not interrupt its extension, Islam expanded rapidly and in areas such as the Sahel, it was even used to maintain social order and progress.

Increased solidarity

The large number of Muslims are behind the religious and cultural ties with the Arab world, links that can be the basis for sympathy and mutual understanding, and therefore solidarity between the two regions. These links also continue to be strengthened.

A knowledge community

Since the earliest times, there were links between scholars in the Sahel and the Arab world. Africans were studying at Al-Azhar University in Cairo and at other universities in the Arab world. Actually, Moroccan universities are the favorite destination of students from the black continent.

Arabs supported the total liberation of Africans against white racist minority regimes in South Africa and, for their part; Africans publicly support the Arab cause in the Middle East. The feeling is quite common that the similar historical experiences of Africans and Arabs as well as their cultural relations and their situation of dominated people at the international level could be a viable basis for future relations between the two neighboring regions.

Challenges

Consequences of slavery

As noted above, the only downside is the slave trade by the Arabs. However, what we often tend to overlook is that Islam is not in favor of slavery and considers it as one of the most regrettable practices that are tolerated. Moreover, Islam is resolutely opposed to racial discrimination.

Conflict motivated solidarity

Some observers have predicted that the Afro-Arab relations could face serious challenges once the problems that federated them, come to get solutions. Indeed, a long term political alliance would be uncertain between groups that initially were interested in each other because they had common enemies. Today's enemies could easily become tomorrow's friends.

More balanced partnership

One of the most serious of these dangers is that one party is trying to dominate the other. The Arab world, by its economic power, might be tempted to dominate the AU and the African Development Bank as well as the African Group in United Nations and in other international conferences and organizations. Arabs are accused of favoring countries with large Muslim populations in their aid programs in black Africa. Even if the Arabs' sympathy for Muslims and Muslim countries of Black Africa is understandable, they should not forget that only eight countries of sub-Saharan Africa have a population comprising at least 50% of Muslims. Leaning too much for Muslims, Arab countries are likely going to cut off themselves from a large number of states of Black Africa.

Another issue that deserves to be mentioned is the fate of Africans in some countries with strong Arab population. Many black African countries have shown their sympathy to the black population in southern Sudan and some have supported their uprising. Also, Mauritania is populated by a large number of black people. Capacity that Africans and Arabs will show to live in harmony in these two countries shall have a significant impact on Afro-Arab cooperation.

ROLE OF PARLIAMENT IN AFRO-ARAB CULTURAL RENAISSANCE.

Cultural identity

Based on the above analysis, we can draw some lines in the role of parliaments in the Afro-Arab cultural renaissance.

As we know, cultural identity is also part of the identity of a human being. The elements of cultural identity are a common language, common history, which is closely linked to the existence of the state and the common religion in a broader sense. Parliaments are called upon to promote those elements that form the basis of cultural identity and can be a bridge between the different peoples.

Promoting religion and sacred places

Religion is one of the pillars of cultural identity, African and Arab parliaments should produce legislation to ensure respect of religions and sacred places and protection of different national cultures.

Promoting inter-community dialogue

In the same vein, it is urgent to strengthen the bridges of dialogue between African and Arab communities as well as the reconciliation foundations and common coexistence with the participation of African and Arab Parliaments in the production of legislation and laws and contribution to the development of effective public policies to combat all forms of segregation of any kind and of any nature. Arab and African parliaments have an important role in promoting harmony and unity in diversity, reconciliation of different cultures and coexistence of peoples with their differences. There is a need to stress on the importance of coordination between the Afro-Arab parliamentary Conference and international organizations such as UNESCO and Afro-Arab non-governmental organizations in the field of promoting cultural diversity and dialogue among civilizations.

In order to sustain the historical and socio-cultural relations between Africa and the Arab world , parliaments are called upon to promote the Afro- Arab museums and

cultural awareness and respect of all religions values while working to find common ground among civilizations in order to address, jointly, the challenges of humanity.

Developing intercultural communication

Globalization is a great source of communication between individuals and increasing interaction between civilizations and cultures, while being the basis of challenges in preserving intellectual, cultural and civilization diversity of humanity. Parliaments should promote intercultural competence of different active political and economic actors in the Afro-Arab cooperation, so they become aware of their dependence on their own systems of values and orientation and better understand the pattern of partners' thoughts and behaviors.

Promotion of intercultural competence

Starting from the assumption that intercultural competence includes three interrelated behavioral dimensions - cognitive, emotional and communicative - parliaments are expected to promote intercultural training centers in which diplomats, businessmen, students and tourism stakeholders will get an orientation that succeeds thanks to the acquisition of knowledge , but also through cognitive restructuring . Understanding of basic concepts and procedures of a foreign culture will make life and work easier in another country.

Promoting knowledge community

At the academic level, the Afro-Arab parliaments should promote research and teaching on the history and geography of Sub-Saharan Africa and the Arab world, by focusing on empires, famous African and Arab people in the history, African Liberation struggle and dissemination and teaching of Arabic and major African languages in the Arab and African universities by African- Arab intellectuals, deepening teaching about Arab and African civilizations while emphasizing on the aspects of convergence and rapprochement between Africa and the Arab World as complementary communities on geographic, demographic and cultural view point .

Creating a framework for intercultural cooperation

Afro-Arab parliaments are encouraged to create a framework for cooperation and intercultural dialogue that would be achieved by the signing of bilateral and multilateral

agreements on cultural cooperation and promotion of existing agreements that may encourage more scholarships exchange between Arab and African countries to support school libraries, to create common cultural centers and revitalize all other cultural channels such as exhibitions, festivals, cultural weeks , film screenings, summer camps , and to promote understanding between the Arab and African youth.

CONCLUSION

Geography, history and socio-cultural ties provide a strong base to build a community, but, ultimately, this building should find its pulse and its main roots in the fact that the Arab and African countries share a socio cultural history dating back many centuries and occupy the same position in the international division of labor, namely a peripheral position. Afro-Arab parliaments must take concrete steps to build a real Afro-Arab community based on equality, mutual benefits and mutual sympathy.

Afro-Arab relations have also created wider cultural links between Black Africa and the Middle East. We find today the descendants of mixed-race Africans in some Arab countries, as there are populations of Arab extraction in Africa. This double crossing can promote understanding between Arab and African countries and provide a basis for Afro-Arab cultural renaissance.