

The 4th congress of the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity took place in Mons (Belgium), 2015 Capital City for Culture, on October 23-24. This was landmark moment for the international civil society movement now in its sixteen year of existence.

For one thing, the number of countries having ratified the Convention has now reached 140, including the European Union, in all regions of the world. Civil society organizations are setting themselves up to be recognized as valuable interlocutors. This is an opportunity for the Convention to be an agent of change and for the Federation of Coalitions to renew itself and broaden its support.

For another, challenges to the diversity of cultural expressions which in the early days came from WTO multilateral trade negotiations and the dominance of Hollywood in movie theatres around the globe has shifted to the Internet where the GAFA (Google, Apple, Facebook and Amazon) now rule with no obligations to support the creation and exhibition of national cultural contents. Impact of the digital era is the hot topic of discussions in the many forums organized this year to mark the Convention's tenth anniversary.

The resolution adopted by delegates to the 4th congress of the International Federation of Coalitions for Cultural Diversity embodies the very essence of the Convention, in the need to protect and promote, to cooperate and to share. A sign of maturity for a movement now poised to open itself to other realities and experiences in the diversity of cultural expressions.

The resolution leaves no ambiguity: digitization is a global concern. Coalitions for Cultural Diversity are supportive of operational guidelines being adopted to clarify the meaning and the reach of the Convention. They also reaffirmed their call to State Parties to explicitly exclude cultural industries, digital or not, from trade negotiations and make reference to the Convention in agreements they negotiate.

Delegates were also eager to see cultural expressions not only better protected but also better promoted through increased cooperation. This was especially important to coalitions from Africa who expressed the view that the implementation of the Convention required continued awareness-raising and innovative funding. The resolution also reaffirms the delegates' attachment to human rights, freedom of creative expressions and the role of culture for sustainable development. A most timely plea was made for the movement to include artists and representatives of cultural NGOs from countries in conflict where the diversity of cultural expressions is under threat or totally banned.

The congress was attended by delegates from some 20 national coalitions for cultural diversity, representing Latin America, Africa, Europe and Asia-Pacific. For the first time, were also present representatives of associations affiliated to the Federation as associate members from Morocco, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Senegal, Niger, Congo-Brazzaville and Uganda, some of which are aspiring to gain full membership status as national coalitions. National and international NGOs were invited as observers. Delegates were pleased to be given the opportunity to have a frank discussion with the Secretary of the Convention, Ms. Danielle Cliche, on the role of civil society which is to be discussed at the next session of the Intergovernmental Committee in Paris, December 14-16.

A very important decision was taken at the congress. In light of the apparent inactivity of some coalitions, their known leaders will be given notice that they have two years to comply with the Federation's membership policy. It is hoped that many will see this as an opportunity to revitalize with the support of associate members and other emerging voices.

On a final note, the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, the Mons Foundation 2015 and the City of Mons must be thanked as well the International Organization of La Francophonie, the Commonwealth Foundation and the French Coalition for Cultural Diversity for their ongoing support. Without them, the 4th congress of the Federation of Coalitions would have not been possible. Delegates to the congress appreciated being invited to attend the Mons International Forum held the following day on the theme "Cultural Exception Faced with the Challenges of the Digital World: How Can Technologies be at the Service of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions?" as part of the Celebration of the Convention's 10th anniversary. The Declaration adopted by the Mons Forum, endorsed by renowned artists Youssou N'Dour, Gilberto Gil, Costa Gavras, Nabil Ayouch, Thierry Michel, Abderrahmane Sissako, Jaco Van Dormael, is now open to signatures.