

Closing session

Ladies and Gentlemen
dear participants -

thank you for the opportunity to speak to you, and for the opportunity to offer you some closing remarks. As a journalist, you know, all you can do is to observe, to listen and to try to understand.

So let me first make a short tour around the topics of the conferences, then, second, I will highlight some topics that arose on a regular basis during the conference and then, third, I will come up with some questions – the best a journalist can do.

1.

Culture, art and society are deeply linked **Philipp Bischof**, Director of Pro Helvetia said in his OPENING ADDRESS – but why and how, he asked. In a world with shifting perspectives, we have to be very clear about what we want to do: and the most important is to translate, wherever translations are needed.

Translation of what and for whom?

We only can translate when we cross each other, translation at the crossroads means growing, personal growing, **Tatjana von Steiger** said. This has a personal, but also a political notion, in the sense, that these crossroads have to be made possible – but why, Tatjana von Steiger asked, is this notion not represented more in the context of development policy? Artists are makers, challengers for society and society change, they call for action – so supporting them is supporting change and, in the best case, democracy and freedom

Yes:

For artists, perhaps, are those who take the highest risks, they are those who stay, even in a very difficult context. I remember a report I read on **Peaceprints**, a website dedicated to reports about the work of artists for peace – can you imagine a group of artists, musicians, travelling through an area under constant threat by bandits, armed groups in Southern Mali? In an area, where no development agencies are working any more? That's exactly what the **Caravane de la Paix** did, with a Festival, travelling from one conflict zone to the other, bringing together different and conflicting populations. Would have been nice to have them here as well, but of course this would be impossible.

Rima Mismar quoted George Orwell - «Art has no option but to be political», for the simple reason, because there is no part of society, no part of one's life that is not in one or another way confronted with art and artistic productions; they have, **Rima Mismar** pointed out, the capability to open our minds, change the direction of our thought, to challenge – writers, photographers, painters, actors do exactly the contrary of what ideologists of all kind try to do: to convince with simplistic, popular, and totalitarian ideas – no: Art is the contrary, it challenges by increasing complexity, by asking question after question, by not giving up. And that's the why, in the Arab world and elsewhere, the first step when the political climate gets colder, is to (first) cut funds for artists, (second) to forbid the screening or the presentation and (third) of course, to deport, to jail, to kill.

This is a fate artists and journalists share, by the way.

For CULTURAL RIGHTS ARE UNDER PRESSURE, but what does it mean. Art is a practice, it happens, and it has an impact, it is there, it touches me, and, of course, it also touches those the artists are targeting with their work. **Patrice Meyer-Bisch** pointed out, that there is no culture in an abstract sense, but the artist, as a person, artists, as persons, present in and with their work.

Who speaks?

The elderly white man?

Or, some day, someone else?

Jumana Al Yasiri pointed out, that it is the young, and the younger adults in a country like Syria that are deprived of this notion: of culture, of future and of a right to beauty. Giving this right also to the most deprived, the losers in society in the Lagos Biennial – that is the context in which **Folakunle Oshun** works in, re-

flecting the colonial context of his country, giving a voice to those who do not even know under which condition they live in; this all in a train terminal, not a pretty exhibition, **Folakunle** said – with another narrative, and the narrative is a narrative of change.

How does this narrative happen?
And how do perceptions of aesthetics change?

First, **Jumana Al Yasiri** pointed out, by exchanges, sometimes forced exchanges, because artists have to flee, in her case: to Europe, making new experiences there, but also by not letting go; in the context of Syria, people who stay, theatre people who stay, artists who stay, with no funding, repressed, in danger, but in a context of solidarity, creating a network – not because they were not able to flee, but because they want to stay. It's all about storytelling, and we heard so many stories in these two days, perhaps the most inspiring part of this conference.

For cultural rights, like all other notions just remain an abstract notion, if we don't tell the stories of repression, and, of course, of resistance, not in the name of any political program, but in the name of art itself; and sometimes resistance is just to continue working in a very difficult economic context – like this young artist I met in Dakar, who started collecting garbage on the streets, assembling plastic bottles, small parts of metal, lost buttons and pieces of metal, creating birds out of the debris he found, a guy who gets up every morning, not knowing if he will be able to feed himself or his children.

There is a notion of loneliness, **Leila Soliman** said in the podium about, HOW TO TALK ABOUT WHAT NO ONE WANTS TO TALK ABOUT, and loneliness is a notion of power. If power wants segregation, the best that can be done is: get closer to the public, **Mandeep Raiky** pointed out; and share the narrative you want to change with your work with others.

So many spaces we have visited in these two days.

We have been to Tunis, to Accra, to Madagascar, but we also made a tour in digital spaces.

As for all the places, it is a question of access, **Emilie Bujès** showed, with found and freely accessible material giving the opportunity to develop and create. Bubblegum Club, a digital space, offering new and fresh aesthetics to discover the complexities of a city like Johannesburg. **Achal Prabala** has shown, that in this digital space we have a series of distortions – even Wikipedia is dominated by white American and European male, and: We deserve a better public park in the Internet. But who is going to create this? Perhaps we have to take a walk to the outskirts of the digital cities to find new parks and new encounters.

Here and there the question remains: Who dictates the rules?

And this is the question when reflecting on the relation between ARTS AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY.

On the last podium there was a certain consensus, that art and culture can contribute in a way to development. But there was another consensus as well – that the term “independent arts” is critical. Supporting arts makes sense because arts raise critical questions, **Regula Gattiker** said; artists are change agents, they are helpful in many ways, they are a mirror, they express the wish to change things. SDC has thus embedded its program of art and culture in a context of migration, democracy and state building in the Maghreb, **Romain Darbellay** said, with the clear assumption, that art and culture by itself are beneficial to local communities. So keep the flow going, without imposing an agenda – but how to manage this? Perhaps in the way **Gertrude Flentge** suggested: support a network, build it up, and then withdraw. Art speaks the language of desire, but development speaks the language of need, **Anmol Vellani** said, art is about failure, while development agencies have to be held accountable, to donors, to governments, to the public; so how do we bring these two things together?

This question remains unanswered.

2.

So let me mention some crucial points that have been raised during this conference.

First **identity**. **Folakunle Oshun** pointed out, that we all come from a long history of colonization, and this is writing down our story; even when you are invited at the French Ambassadors house in Dakar and you are confronted with a group of officers, all in their uniform, showing that artists are kind of a dangerous species – telling you what: perhaps to choose, either to adapt to what we call the western, and, in the case, the militarized western, or to be pushed back to another context – perhaps, in the best sense, the concept of *négritude*, or,

in the worst, of African tribalism. Power has a problem with shifting and transformative, fluid identities, so let's keep the identities fluid and complex.

Second **colonialism, postcolonialism** – gold has been mentioned, and it was pointed out, what Switzerland has to do with; and what does it mean when a theatre group is about to set up a new identity of a City like Brussels connected more to Kinshasa or to Ramallah – a notion Jan Goossens mentioned yesterday at the conversations – an less to the homeland; I think THAT is the crossroads of the discussions and the debates, where we might find common pathway of discussions across the continents, from south to north, as a crossroad as well. For those who have experienced and still experience colonialism and those who still take profit from colonialism, past and present. In all this, Switzerland is not an island, not only when it comes to the subject of gold, but also when we look back to a colonial past still to be discovered by art and by science.

Third **sharing of vulnerability**, not being left alone, sharing the sense, that as an artist, you are always in a vulnerable position; not let inner censorship block your creativity – all this has been a subject in so many talks during this conference, and I think that we should not, therefore, forget one important issue: that solidarity matters.

3.

To sum up I have 3 questions:

First - lets not instrumentalize Art, it is political by itself, it is an antidote to political realm, otherwise it will become propaganda, **Rima Mismar** said and many others did; so my question would be – when are we touching the tipping point, when art is being exploited for the benefit of development?

Second – the hope, that Art will save the world – the question came up from the audience. There is a sense of hope, and as a conclusion I would like to reflect about an essential point that has to do with what we might call a «cultural turn» in the discussion around development strategies. My question would be:

- after the pitfall of strategies of economic justice, that were discussed in the seventies and eighties in the context of what was called the New Economic Order, and after the failure of so many alternative strategies of economic order after the crash of the bipolar world; and after so many decades, where we have seen a decrease of poverty, yes, and a betterment of the conditions of many in the south, yes, but where we have also seen a growing gap between the rich and the poor, and a climate of the planet about to collapse WHERE DO WE STAND?

- and after so many hopes we all had in the development of democracy in so many countries, not only in Africa, hoping that democratization will bring more justice, more participation – we have seen a lot of countries fall back into structures of authoritarianism, in the Middle East, in Africa, or we have seen failed countries a little bit everywhere: I guess that we do have to admit is that there is a sense of failure, of deception, especially since one of the largest and most powerful countries of the world is showing signs of authoritarianism – WO WHERE DO OUR HOPES GO?

- perhaps we lay all our hopes in the arts, hoping, that art will really change the world, so my question would be: WHAT DO WE DO IF WE FAIL AS ARTISTS, AS ART INSTITUTIONS?

Third, and my last question, and perhaps it is about the elephant in the room. **Laza**, the Director of the Film Festival in Madagascar said: "Let's be careful about those who want to fund our work". To be careful in this regard also means that we have to be sensitive about this other question I mentioned above: "Who dictates the rules", and in a world where we have to deal with a very INTIMATE RELATION OF ART AND MONEY we should ask ourselves: "Are we ready to share (money, power) without preconditions?"

Thank you

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