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Statement on the occasion of the Forum “GATS and Sustainable Development”: How does liberalisation of trade in audio-visual and cultural services challenge cultural services?  

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Ladies and Gentlemen,  
imaging the following situation:  
You want to buy a book. You can go to different book shops in your town, but all shops belong to two or three big international companies. The offer of the shops is very small: only the bestsellers, very few of your own country, most of them from popular writers all over the world. Most of the available books are thrillers or lovestories. If you try to find some local, regional or national young authors: no chance.  
Do you think this is a horror scenario?  
In Germany we have more and more such big book companies and the offer of these shops is exactly what I have described. But up to now we have also other book shops where you can find unknown authors, even e. g. books with poetry which are economically not interesting. But smaller book shops and publishing houses can exist only, because there is an instrument like “Buchpreisbindung”. That means: no market competition over prices. And we have special reduced taxes for books. In preparing this conference I found some interesting examples about what happens if the cultural market has been opened without any protection of the national cultural production. In Mexico for example there was some years ago a flourishing literature, there were many publishing houses until government made the decision to cancel the possibility of reduced taxes on books. After this decision most of the publishing houses went bankrupt.  
There were similar developments in the field of film industry. A good example is the film culture in Turkey, which had a very interesting film production until the market was opened without any protection of the national film production. The number of Turkish films decreased from about 250 to 20.
If you live in such circumstances with extremely reduced cultural offers where you cannot find cultural products which deal with your own national, regional or even local problems, then you can feel, that our main arguments are right which are:

- Cultural diversity has to do with the recognition of real problems of the people.
- Cultural diversity has to do a lot with liberty, with the free expression of meaning, with debating values of life, with orientation.
- Cultural diversity has to do with sustaining development in economy, in social and political life, so that we say, like the UNESCO does: cultural diversity is as important for the society as bio-diversity is for nature.
- Cultural products do have an economic dimension, but: they are different from normal goods because they are necessary means for expression and reflection of sense.

This is the reason why in the last years cultural diversity has become the most important concept in the international cultural policy. Meanwhile we have some important initiatives and declarations to this point.

- There is, in the context of INCD, a letter from artists to artists in order to encourage the colleagues in the arts to get involved in this debate. I will give you a quotation out of this letter:

  “Many human conflicts arise from a failure to recognise cultural complexities or from perceived threats to cultural values. The road to security and prosperity requires that we celebrate and encourage our cultural diversity and embrace and respect our cultural differences.”

- We have some declarations on cultural diversity of bodies like the Council of Europe.

- Very important is the result of the UN World Decade on Culture and Development which took place between 1988 and 1998. One result was the report “Our Creative Diversity”, written by a group of scientists and politicians under the leadership of Perez de Cuellar.

And one result of this world decade and the report of de Cuellar is important just in the context of the present WTO negotiations: Culture and cultural diversity are not only necessary for the wellbeing of the people, they are also necessary for sustainable social and democratic development and – very interesting in the contexts of WTO – for a sustainable economic development.

You may know, that even the world bank has started to change its strategy in order to respect cultural conditions of development. The winner of the Nobel Price in economy some years
ago, Amartya Sen, has written a lot of books about the close connection of cultural diversity and sustainable development.

The most important paper in this context is the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity of the UNESCO from November 2001. In this text you can find a very precise description of the role of culture for societies and individuals.

Coming now to our Cancún Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

Our Cancún Declaration on Cultural Diversity is a declaration from NGO’s. The German Cultural Council which is the umbrella organisation of most cultural organisations in Germany, has two German partners: a political foundation and a national broadcasting network. I am happy to have as an international partner the International Network of Cultural Diversity (INCD) which was found in 1998 after the last world congress on cultural policy in Stockholm.

Our declaration consists in two parts.

In part one you find a short explanation of the relevance of cultural diversity which is similar to the argumentation we have heard in the statements of the speakers of the panel.

Part two formulates five demands which in our eyes are necessary to be respected above all in trade policy and also in other political fields. I will give you a very brief description of these five demands.

The first point says that we need a national cultural industry, because a big part of arts and culture fulfils their social functions very concrete, that means on a local, regional or national level.

The second point will encourage national governments to develop conceptions of a cultural policy and – very important – spend some money for subsidising culture.

The next point, number three, sounds a little bit complicated: It means, decisions in other political fields may have consequences for culture. Therefore we have to check especially international trade rules in this concern.

The fourth point has to do with standards of democratic procedures: It is a progress, that NGO’s now have a kind of official status within the WTO negotiations. Now we should do the next step: An integration of the NGO’s into the official delegations. Because we need an intensive dialogue not only among different countries, but also between different positions in the same country.

The last point is a point of international solidarity.
Finally I would like to invite you now to support and to sign our Cancùn Declaration on Cultural Diversity. Thank you.