

# First Global Forum on Leadership for Shared Societies: *Building a world safe for difference*

November 12-14, 2008 • Rotterdam, The Netherlands

## Concept Note

**Summary:** The Club of Madrid and the City of Rotterdam, with the support of the *Comunidad de Madrid*, will host the First **Global Forum on Leadership for Shared Societies: *building a world safe for difference***, November 12-14. At the Forum, high-level and emerging leaders from government, politics, civil society and other decision-shaping institutions will discuss an imperative leaders face: improving social inclusion. With increasing diversity in the world's nations and communities, and at a time when the pressures of economic uncertainty, energy and climate change crises, and food emergencies threaten social stability, leaders must take action against social exclusion and work to improve social cohesion. The meeting, and the Shared Societies Project of which it is part, aim to identify policies and practices that reduce identity-based conflict and build shared futures where diversity is celebrated and drawn on for the economic and social betterment of all. The Forum will identify and share the motives, incentives and benefits that drive leaders to act for social cohesion and celebrate the commitment of leaders and communities working towards that goal.

**Why:** Nations, cities and communities are becoming more diverse. Ninety percent of the world's countries have at least a ten percent minority population. As communities become ever more intertwined and intercultural, leaders face the challenge of building and maintaining shared societies and a world made safe for difference. Many embrace and celebrate diversity –seeing strength for their societies in difference– and recognize the economic, social and political opportunities. By working to promote dialogue, deepen understanding, and create opportunity, many leaders are reducing the hate, hurt and humiliation that undermine human dignity. Others, though, sensing, reflecting or exploiting fears and prejudices based on differences and insecurity among their constituents – who feel their identity, their community or their economic well-being threatened - call for secured borders and deportations. The Forum will address what may be “the most important conversation of our time”—that of how to manage ethnic, cultural, religious and other identity differences while protecting and preserving human dignity.

**Who:** The [Club of Madrid](#), whose members are 70 current and former Heads of State and Government from 50 countries with more than two millennia of collective political experience, works to strengthen “democracy that delivers”. Bill Clinton is honorary chair and Jimmy Carter and Kofi Annan are honorary members. Its President is Ricardo **Lagos** (Chile), and Vice President is Mary **Robinson** (Ireland). Jenny **Shipley** (New Zealand) and Cassam **Uteem** (Mauritius) co-chair the Project and the Forum.

The [City of Rotterdam](#) –aiming to be Europe's leading Intercultural City and European Youth Capital in 2009– exemplifies the challenge of implementing local policies to meet the global challenge that is coexistence in diversity. Former Dutch Prime Minister and Chair of the city's International Advisory Board Ruud **Lubbers** and Mayor Ivo **Opstelten** are among Rotterdam and Dutch leaders participating in this endeavor.

The Global Forum is part of the Club of Madrid's *Shared Societies Project*. The project responds to a call from leaders worldwide for options and action plans to address the challenge of coexistence, a challenge facing every society. The Club of Madrid and its members are inspired by the efforts of government and civic leaders working to overcome identity-based conflict. We are committed to working with them to further inspire other leaders and to issue a global call to action for a world made safe for difference.

**What:** In partnership with political, government and community leaders, the Forum and the Shared Societies Project seek to identify proven effective strategies and tools that promote coexistence and social cohesion as well as powerful arguments to do so. Through the Shared Societies Project, leaders are inspiring and equipping officials to launch actions to include

more fully those who feel they are threatened, have been discriminated against or marginalized, or who do not feel fully comfortable in the societies in which they live.

To date, the Shared Societies Project has: brought leaders and their experience to bear in important dialogue processes for greater social cohesion in several countries facing these challenges, reviewed a number of relevant case studies and the leading literature on the subject, identified and collated best practises, and advanced thinking and action on the issue in the most challenging of settings.

Shared Societies Project partners include the City of Rotterdam, the European Commission; the Governments of Canada, Norway and Madrid; the UN Democracy Fund; the Hunt Alternatives Fund and the Dr. Scholl and Alan B. Slifka Foundations.

**How:** The Global Forum on Leadership for Shared Societies will convene members of the Club de Madrid, current leaders, officials from international organisations, international experts, youth and civil society leaders to explore why and how to build a world safe for difference in countries, cities and societies.

In plenary and break-out sessions, participants will engage in constructive dialogue that serves to inspire leaders and call them to action to promote social cohesion. Side events will celebrate diversity and showcase practices of social cohesion. Specifically the Forum will:

- Identify the most effective arguments and means to encourage leaders to take responsibility for promoting social cohesion;
- Introduce and launch the Club of Madrid Portfolio of Policies and Practices to Promote Social Cohesion, a tool kit to help leaders tackle problems of social division;
- Highlight the importance of leadership in promoting social cohesion and the responsibility of others to encourage leaders to accept that role and not to discourage them;
- Examine specific examples of how leaders have implemented policies and programmes to promote social cohesion and the lessons which have been learnt from those experiences, including how best to support leaders in identifying and implementing appropriate strategies;
- Develop consensus and commitment on how to build support for promoting social cohesion around the world and build networks between those individuals and organisations working to building social cohesion;
- Invite leaders from individual countries and cities, international organisations and civil society to identify how they will advance the goal of promoting social cohesion can be developed in their context.

**Where:** The international Forum will be hosted in Rotterdam, a city intrinsically associated with and dedicated to intercultural dialogue, diversity, democratic leadership, and social cohesion. The Forum will take place in the [Van Nelle Ontwerpfabriek](#) November 12-14.

**Result:** This Global Forum will launch an international call for action for dialogue, social cohesion and the management of diversity in ways that recognize and treats difference as a source of richness for societies.

The meeting in Rotterdam aims to inspire leaders to work for a shared society; share with them effective policies and practices in promoting social cohesion; and obtain their support for a Call to Action for the ongoing dissemination and practice of those ideas. The Forum's key message will be: **'Leadership for social cohesion is not only critical but also possible'**.

The Club of Madrid will then be equipped to bring this message of optimism and practical opportunities to international fora and to leaders looking for the relevant leadership advice that Members of the Club of Madrid can offer.

**Info:** For more information on the Club of Madrid, please visit: [www.clubmadrid.org](http://www.clubmadrid.org).

For further information on the Shared Societies Project:  
[www.thesharedsocietiesproject.clubmadrid.org](http://www.thesharedsocietiesproject.clubmadrid.org).