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**Strategies to Advance Civic Space in Countries with
Limited Adherence to the Rule of Law:**

Report on the Argentine Dialogue: 2001-2005

**The ICNL-Cordaid Civil Liberties Prize
Honorable Mention**

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ABSTRACT

The **Argentine Dialogue** was a process which, by means of the widespread participation of Argentine society, has intended to contribute to the reconstruction of the basis of social cohabitation in the Argentine Republic. It was called by the **Argentine Government**, with the participation of the **Argentine Episcopal Conference**, and the technical support of the **United Nations Development Programme**.

The **objectives** of this dialogue were: the involvement of political, corporate, labour and social forces to undergo a process of national dialogue, find general solutions for the mid and long term and work on the definition of a national sustainable project.

In the development of the Argentine Dialogue we can identify two stages. The first one included the following **stages**: “**Dialogue with Leaders**” of the different sectors of society; **Section Boards**, aimed at reaching a series of basic agreements to face the emergency and develop general consents on public policies; and the devise and commitment summarized in the document of consent titled, “**Basis for Reforms**” intended to implement fundamental changes in the transition period.

This process achieved **positive results**: to recover dialogue as a consensus generating instrument, to contribute to social peace-making in light of the crisis; to recover the essential values for life in society; to foster actions to meet the needs of social emergency and to reform social policies and identify the basic consents for the transition period.

In the second stage (2003-2005) various social sectors called for the continuation of the process. Accordingly, an **Extended Board of the Argentine Dialogue**, with the participation of a large number of representatives of non government and religious organizations, and corporate and workers entities. Religious communities are the largest and best-organized civil institutions, claiming the allegiance across race, class, and national divides. These communities have particular cultural understandings, infrastructures, and resources to get help where it is needed most. This stage of the Argentine Dialogue featured a **greater involvement of civil society**.

The Argentine Dialogue offered the institutional space, acted as a catalyst, which should be accompanied by the leading participation and new attitudes and actions by the players of all areas, as from the number of social and communal institutions. However, the contributions and innovations that this experience has provided to the transition process in favor of the Argentine society reconstruction seem to be highly significant.

When it comes to a global evaluation, **the Dialogue contributions should not be forgotten** as regards the recovery of national dialogue and the contributions to the interests of social pacification and restoration of essential values for the coexistence and reconstruction of the common good.

When revising the process developed by the Argentine Dialogue, it may be recognized that the stages of the exchanges made with the players such as deliberations of sectorial coordination tables have been valuable experiences, learning exercises that have boosted and validated the way for the dialogue as a crucial methodology to solve conflicts and reach main consensus to develop State policies in a democratic society.

This consideration reinforces the conviction that even though the results achieved by the Argentine Dialogue up to now are significant, there are still pending some important tasks and phases to develop the dialogue among Argentine people, and it should finally be incorporated effectively to the institutional and social practice of the democratic process in our country.

Thus, the Argentine Dialogue is **a solid base to boost the efforts even more in order to widen and consolidate the consensus**, to implement the reforms demanded by society, to advance in the joint construction of the State policies, to project a country strategic vision for Argentina.

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**STRATEGIES TO ADVANCE CIVIC SPACE IN COUNTRIES WITH
LIMITED ADHERENCE TO THE RULE OF LAW:**

REPORT ON THE ARGENTINE DIALOGUE: 2001-2005

1. COMPARATIVE INTERNATIONAL ANALYSIS

1.1 A view to the national dialogue processes in Latin America

Almost all countries in Latin America share the opinion that in the past two years the development process has basically been guided by economic policies which essentially followed the tenets of “Washington Consensus” (fiscal discipline, free trade, privatization, openness to foreign direct investment, among others) and has not been translated into continuous improvement in the quality of life for most of the people. In view of this situation, the aim was to implement the economics policy with deeper institutional and judicial reforms, more extensive rights to the security given to the private investment, direct interventions to reduce poverty and the creation of mechanisms to provide a higher degree of legal and civil security. (Zovatto, 2002)

Likewise, there is the spread conviction that solutions based on participation and consensus, and having a broad foundation for civil legitimacy contribute to “armor” the highly important reform process against pollution of partisan politics. In this way, the reforms would turn into state policies and not just policies of the government of the moment, thus increasing its viability and durability in the long term.

But there is agreement that the open, participative, inclusive and plural nature of these processes allow increasing the sense of civil property of reforms, consolidating participation while giving presence and voice in issues that have been traditionally reserved only for the political leadership or for influential minority groups involved.

In other words, what they intend is to create confidence, commitment, certainty, political and economic stability and legal security with the objective to encourage the private sector (national and international) to invest in order to produce a sustained economic growth without which nothing is possible.

Other reason that puts the dialogue into practice, as was stated in the recent Monterrey Agreement lies in the fact that those countries having a long-term vision – which will serve as a guide for a development strategy– will have better opportunities to obtain financial support by international bodies.

1.2 Different origins and causes of the national dialogue processes

Characteristics of a national dialogue process

- Contributes to the consolidation of democracy.
- Joins the diverse national players round common goals.
- Promotes the evaluation of the pace of democratic development.
- Enables the identification of main areas for the mediation and articulation of adequate cooperation programs.
- Enables the impact evaluation on external cooperation.

It also helps to the following:

- Lead the debate on democratization.
- Identify possible deficiencies of the political system.
- Shape a national consensus about development priorities.
- Make agreement on the actions to be taken.

A dialogue process may arise from different reasons. Among others, it can start with the objective to design a shared and long-term country vision, or with the objective to overcome a blockade, or with the aim of achieving an agreement that allows beginning the reconstruction of a society divided by an armed conflict.

The national dialogue may also originate from situations of deep crisis or changes requiring rapprochement and understanding among parties, or due to increasing demands from society, either looking for solutions or options for participation. (Zovatto,2002)

As we see, the dialogue originates from many different reasons. In some cases, the dialogue is appealed due to the governance crisis faced by the country. This seems to be the case of the dialogues in Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Mexico, Peru and the Argentine, among others.

In fact, according to Carlos Doré Cabral, who was in charge of conducting a National Dialogue in Dominican Republic during the President Leonel Fernandez administration, the main factor that hastened the dialogue was the socio-political reality which represents a considerable threat to the democratic governance that was originated and then acquired strength before the start of such social participation process and ended with the general strike on November 11-12, 1997; a week before the decree of November 19 where it was announced to the country the creation of an Organizing Committee for the National Dialogue¹

In Costa Rica, the crisis of civil legitimacy of the political system, together with a deep transformation in the development style unable to keep ensuring social mobility and sustained improvement of lifestyles and quality of life, led to a consensus process call in 1998. This was thought as a means to face the bottleneck situations of national development, while trying to develop democracy coexistence, especially to achieve advances regarding levels of social dialogue and civil participation in the decision-making processes.

In other words, the national consensus call was to respond to the political situation of Costa Rica at that moment. The February 1998 election results clearly showed social disillusion and political apathy. On the other hand, the urgency of

Origins and causes of the national dialogue processes

1. Crisis of the democratic institutionalism legitimacy.
2. Representation Crisis..
3. Governance Crisis
4. To respond society's blockade.
5. To plan a shared country vision in the long term to be used as a frame of reference for the development strategy.
6. To create extensive consensus regarding sector public policies.
7. To build confidence in deeply divided and/or polarized societies
8. To institutionalize civil society participation.
9. To consolidate piece in post-conflict situations.

¹ DORE CABRAL, Carlos Op. Cit. "The Dialogue model taken into account was the situation in Bolivia." However, in case of Dominican Republic, the urgent character of the National Dialogue Consensus, due to difficult situations that the country was facing politically, established a considerable level of improvisation. Because of that, the dialogue faced an atmosphere of distrust from some players (who did not believe in the good faith of the Government and thought that it was its strategy to save time) as well as the non-participation of the main opposition party, democratic revolutionary party (*Partido Revolucionario Democrático-PRD*), (in administration at present) and unions."

economic reforms and policies for the national development model suggested the pressing need of making detailed social agreements about what course had to be taken for the country. On top of this, there was also the diversity of interests and social groups that had appeared in Costa Rica in the past years. All these factors together made more difficult the political negotiation and national consensus formation that would lay the foundations of a long-lasting development²

In Mexico, the situation of a "divided government" that resulted from July 2000 elections led President Fox to propose the signing of Political Agreement for the National Development that came true on October 7, 2001, with the objective of harmonizing the change with political stability, plurality, government efficiency, economic certainty and national development³

In Peru, a similar situation led President Alejandro Toledo to appeal for Dialogue in order to make the National Agreement possible. Meanwhile, in Argentina, it was the serious political, economic and social situation (which swept 5 presidents in 15 days between the end of December 2001 and the beginning of January 2002) that led President Duhalde to ask the Catholic Church and UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] for help regarding the appeal, and set in motion of a National Dialogue.

But in other countries, the appeal for national dialogue had different reasons. So, in Bolivia, for example, in 1997 National Dialogue (country global vision) and 2000 Dialogue about fighting poverty (provide HIPCII resources and give supplies for Bolivian strategy to reduce poverty [*Estrategia Boliviana para Reducir la Pobreza-EBRP*]), the main reasons for the dialogue were the following: (i) improve representative democracy with elements of participative democracy; (ii) overcome "partyarch"; (iii) make agreements between the political system and society; (iv) create public spheres between the State and society in order to organize proposals that turned into public policies; (v) make agreements that became State policies and (vi) create an active and co-responsible people⁴

1.3 Organizations in Charge of National Dialogues

As we have seen in the issues covered up to now regarding the diverse Latin American experiences about national dialogues, there is no common method or pattern or ideal type to organize such exercises. Subsequently, the decision of the responsible agency or body about the dialogue plan and management does not respond to a preconceived idea, but, on the contrary, each experience, for reasons already shown, has been adapted to the peculiarities of each society in which the dialogue would be developed.

² CONARE/PNUD. Op.Cit.

³ DIEZ DE SOLLANO, Jorge; SUZAN, Eric and de RAMES, Alain (2002). Op.Cit.

⁴ TORANZO, Carlos (2002). 1997-2000 Dialogues. Bolivia. Report elaborated for the workshop "*El Papel de los Diálogos en la Política Social. Implicaciones para la Estrategia de Desarrollo Social del BID*". Santiago, Chile. March 30 and 31, 2002

However, it was observed that in almost all cases, the planning of the long-term vision and strategy has come from the Presidency of the Argentine Nation or some of the Ministries. It is worth mentioning, however, that the Secretaries of Treasury or Finance have been reluctant to participate in these processes, so it is important to make efforts to achieve a greater degree of commitment and participation from these officers.

After these preliminary considerations, we can review different cases of Dialogue which explain diverse options about the institution, body or agency in charge of carrying out each experience.

So, in Dominican Republic, the Organizing Committee for the National Dialogue, formed by 11 citizens, was created by Executive Decree. In this committee participated the President of the Argentine Nation, two government officers and eight personalities from universities, churches, non-governmental organizations, the business sector and the media, among others; all of them were called in an unofficial capacity. Despite its plural character, the Committee was not exempt from criticism mainly on its origin through Executive decree.

In a similar way, in Salvador, the National Development Committee was established in 1997 by the President's appeal with the express order of postponing the initial discussion agenda and organizing the consultation process, which would promote views on the national future in the medium and long term. This committee was composed of six people in an unofficial capacity representing different ideological positions. It is worth mentioning that the National Development Committee was established as an autonomous and independent authority which was civil, plural and flexible.

In Peru, the initiative was created in the Executive, and the political responsibility of leading the dialogue, as for the government, rests with the presidency of the Ministries Council. Likewise, the government asked a civil society organization, *Transparencias*, to act as a technical assistant in the dialogue process in order to seal the National Agreement. The Table was composed by representatives from the government, political parties represented in parliament, the business sector, the syndical sector, regional fronts and churches. This case stood out due to the formation of a Consultant Council composed of five international and three national personalities to support the process.

In Bolivia, the appeal finds its roots in a group of intellectuals with known independence and openness. This initiative is then made viable with the most government democratic sectors. So, as regards both dialogues (1997 and 2000) the appeal was made by the President of the Argentine Nation who entrusted this job to the Vice President. The Vice President, together with the group of intellectuals that suggested the idea, organized round the process Technical Secretary, were in charge of putting together the agenda and leading the dialogue. Although this is an autonomous agency, it worked amicably with the Executive and it received the financial support of the common fund set up by the international cooperation. Precisely by 2000, the initiative came at the same time as the international bodies requisites for the cooperative allocation resources and coincided with them.

In Costa Rica, the appeal was issued by the President of the Argentine Nation. It is interesting to mention that the national dialogue was part of the President's campaign

promises. The exercise started with an Agreement Committee made up by six members who were in charge of the comprehensive exercise. To this end, the Committee started analyzing a number of international experiences and held around 60 advisory meetings with the different Costa Rican civil society sectors, as well as similar meetings with political parties. In addition to them, a continuous communication and advisory channel was opened, with state universities and the Catholic Church.

The Costa Rica experience had a Coordinating Table, led by the Presidency Minister which was in charge of moderating the discussion and set the deadlines for the resolution of issues. The Executive Secretary was also established. Its main role was to support the Coordinating Table and gather information, systematize inputs and elaborate process reports. Apart from these two agencies, they also set up the National Forum for the Agreement, which was a space for negotiation between the different political and social forces, the Agreement Verification Committee, and the Mediators Board, in charge of settling those aspects in which the National Forum might not reach an agreement.

In Mexico, the Political Agreement for the National Development was the result of the recent political development and the acknowledgement of Federal Government and political parties that in the face of a significant fragmentation in both legislative chambers it was inevitable to make basic agreements to promote the development of an agenda and the adherence to it that will facilitate the country governance. On the basis of these considerations, such political agreement was signed between the Federal Government and the political parties with legislative representation on October 7, 2001. Unlike other cases, in Mexico there was an agreement negotiated between the Secretary of the Interior and representatives of the political parties with representation in Congress, and then invited unions and businessmen to adhere to it.

2. THE ARGENTINE DIALOGUE

2.1 Presentation

The **Argentine Dialogue** is a process that, by means of the extensive participation of society, has aimed to contribute to the reconstruction of the social cohabitation in view of the deep political, constitutional, economic and social crisis that Argentina is facing. (Gerardo Noto,2004)

Since 2001, the Resident Representative of the UNDP, Carmelo Angulo Barturen, promoted a number of actions with the objective of setting up the dialogue and the agreement as tools to resolve conflicts and build consensus that would allow developing public policies aimed at overcoming the crisis. These efforts were coherent with the repeated Catholic Church appeals for dialogue among Argentine people.⁵

With the arrival of a new transition government, the then President of the Country Dr. Eduardo Duhalde made a public appeal for national dialogue, in response to the “urgent call made by Argentine Episcopal Conference [*Conferencia Episcopal Argentina*] to the political leadership for responsibility, with the contribution and help

⁵ See, *El diálogo que la Patria necesita*, 130ª Reunión de la Comisión Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, December 3, 2001

of the UNDP” to "develop a national dialogue process capable of correcting the course that led the country to this distressing present situation.”⁶

The first stage of this process was developed from January 2000 to the issuing of the document “*Bases para las reformas,*” which summarizes the consensus reached as a result of that period. A new period started in October 2002.

On January 14, 2002, the National Government called for the Argentine Dialogue with the participation of the Argentine Episcopal Conference and the collaboration of 3 lay people: Cristina Calvo, Juan Llach and Humberto Terrizano, and provided the spiritual space for the Catholic Church, and the technical support of the PNUD, as detailed further.

The objectives set by the National Government to this forum on political and social agreement were as follows:

“Participation of political, business, work and social forces to face the collapse that puts us in an extreme situation of anarchy and fratricide violence.”

Find “medium- and long-term solutions.”

And “work in the definition of a sustained national project.”

The priorities for this project were as follows: “emergency solutions,” and a “considerable institutional reform that includes from the essential reduction of political spending to the necessary reshaping of the State.”⁷

From the appeal made by the President of the Nation, the National Dialogue Table was organized in order to promote this process. This Table was made up by three representatives of each of such institutions.

In view of the serious **crisis** of the country, in which some of the most crucial moments were experienced at the end of December 2001 and during the first months of 2002, and also in the face of the society's deep distrust and skepticism regarding institutions and all kind of political leaders, the National Table designed a **methodology** to contribute to the dialogue development, having as immediate goals the following matters:

- Overcome skepticism and mistrust regarding the dialogue from many social sectors.
- Promote a broad social participation.
- Build a legitimate sphere of dialogue for society.
- Contribute to the building of the consensus pursued.

It is important to mention that the institutional frame demanded by society for the process to move forward was given by the essential presence and participation of the Catholic Church and the UNDP, since these institutions are recognized by being neutral, objective and experienced.

⁶ Speech of Dr. Eduardo Duhalde before the Legislative Committee when he took office as President of Argentine Nation.

⁷ Message to the Nation of the President Eduardo Duhalde from the Church Santa Catalina de Siena Buenos Aires Argentina January 14 2002.

2.2 First Stage

Initially, a set of bilateral meetings were made with players from different sectors of society, the **Dialogue with Players**⁸ [*Dialogo con Actores*], with the objective of establishing a dialogue and put it into practice, overcoming uncertainty and mistrust, and also identifying the main issues and necessary agreements. In these dialogues participated Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), business institutions, unions, micro and small businesses, emerging groups, professional institutions, national and provincial political parties, religious groups, provincial and municipal governments and members of the National Legislative Power. When this stage was over, the document "*Bases para el Diálogo Argentino*" was written.⁹

In the second stage, there were agreements in which **Sectorial Tables** were implemented to reach a set of essential agreements in order to meet the priorities resulting from the emergency situation and develop consensus about public policies to be implemented in the medium and long term.

The following tables were organized: social-labor-productive, health, education, judicial and political reform. Then, a building and housing table was appealed. The sectorial tables kept working in the progress of the actions set. The achievements in the Health Table, Judicial, Housing and Building Reform were highlighted.¹⁰

As a result of the first stage, the document "*Construir la Transición*" was written. This document summarizes the agreements signed in the sectorial tables and was given to the President of the Nation on February 28, 2002.

In order to continue the efforts regarding the national dialogue, the Table promoted new experiences, Provinces Dialogues –which were pilot experiences in Catamarca, Corrientes and La Pampa Provinces– and in Buenos Aires City Dialogue for the Homeless.

In order to move forward in the building of essential consensus to implement basic changes during the transition period, the Dialogue Table wrote the document ***Bases para las Reformas: Principales Consensos*** that summarized the core of consensus which resulted in the Argentine Dialogue. This document was made public to the people on July 11, 2002, obtaining people, political leaders and institutions adherence.

The publishing of this document set the **conclusion of the first stage of the Argentine Dialogue**, which showed a number of satisfactory results which included the following:

- The restoration of the dialogue as a means to achieve agreements.
- The contribution to the social pacification in view of the crisis and the risk of social anomie and dissolution.
- Efforts to restore essential values for social life: The ethical sense of the "Public" and the commitment with the common good.

⁸ In the Dialogue with Players participated about 500 political leaders in representation of around 100 institutions. There were 150 hours of deliberations registered, analyzed and filed by the UNDP.

⁹ Argentine Dialogue, *Bases para el Diálogo Argentino*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, January 30, 2002.

¹⁰ In this stage from the Sectorial Tables participated more than 750 representatives of 300 institutions of all the country.

- Actions to deal with the social emergency situation and reform the social policy. Heads of Household Program [*Programa Jefas y Jefes de Hogar*] and health policies generic prescription medicine and Remedy Program [*Programa Remediar*].
- Make progress regarding the identification of the essential consensus for the transition: *Bases para las Reformas*.

As regards the **achievements realized**, it is worth mentioning the transparent role played by the Argentine Dialogue in order to develop new tools associated to social policies in view of the social demands due to the emergency situation. On the one hand, the Dialogue Table promoted the acknowledgement of the Family Right to Social Inclusion¹¹ which was received legally by the National Executive Power by decree 565 of April. 3, 2002 with the launching of **Unemployed Household Program**.¹² This decision involved making progress in the social program structural reforms, adding stages of social participation and control in order to contribute to a clear process. The UNDP has supported, at the beginning of the process, the consolidation of the National Council of Administration, Execution and Control¹³ and its Executive Secretary.

Also, it is important to mention the consensus achieved in the Argentine Dialogue Health Sectorial Table, which channeled the society support into a policy on **prescribing medicine by generic name and Remedy Program**. And now there is the implementation of the **Child and Mother Health Insurance** whose objective is to guarantee health service for pregnant women and children under five years old.

On the other hand, there are still some matters pending for a new dialogue stage: The need to make progress in the political and institutional reform, the renewal and change of attitude by the leadership sectors, the development of state policies with social consensus in all the sectors associated to public policies.

When reviewing this first stage of the Argentine Dialogue it seems important to be able to see the achievements, –implement a dialogue stage in view of the seriousness of the crisis– its immediate results –the consensus achieved– and the final objectives of the process: to effectively get transformations done. As regards the first two aspects, considerable progress has been made, while in the objectives set later there is still a long way to go; that is to say, the realization of the agreements made to implement reforms effectively. One of the most important causes of this failure was the debilitation of the transition government established on January 1, 2002, which led to an early appeal for elections in March 2003, and also the fact that the transition government objectives, as a transformation process, could not be achieved.

When this stage ended, a number of social players demanded to continue with the job of the Sectorial Tables, the consolidation of the discussion about the important agreements and the need of getting closer to the basic social fabric supporting and promoting the actual participation boost. It is worth mentioning the particular posture of

¹¹ Argentine Dialogue, Document *Derecho Familiar de Inclusión Social*, Buenos Aires, Argentina, March 18, 2002.

¹² The unemployed Heads of Household Program is being revised and modified, but still continues to be the biggest social program in the country, reaching more than two million people, with a monthly budget of around 300 million *pesos*.

¹³ The National Administration, Execution and Control Council was created by 565/02 Decree, and is composed of 15 members, 12 of which represent the main organizations of businessmen, workers (and unemployed), denominational institutions and NGOs, leaving three positions to national ministries with jurisdiction in the Program.

the Argentine Episcopal Conference, which within the frame of the Extraordinary Meeting evaluated positively the experience of the Argentine Dialogue. It emphasized the consensus achieved in the document *Bases para las Reformas* “which can promote the restoration of the democratic institutions in our country,” and said that “now the dialogue begins a new and different phase,” in which “all citizens” should participate “in the restoration of our social life” and committed themselves to “help and extend this dialogue to every corner of the country.”¹⁴

2.3 Second Stage

On October 18, 2002, the first plenary session of the **Argentine Dialogue Extended Table** was held. Here a broad representation of civil society participated: from different creed and expressions of faith (Catholic, Evangelicals, Jews and Moslem), NGOs, business and worker institutions. In this meeting a number of strategic lines were adopted to be followed in the second stage of the dialogue in the four stated areas. Communication and the Media, Dialogue with All the People, Impact on the Governance Situation and Agenda. The **Operative Group of the Extended Table** was also created. It was made up by 10 members of different NGOs and denominational participants, under the coordination of **Cristina Calvo** (Caritas Argentina), in charge of planning and implementing the necessary actions to meet the objectives of the second stage.

In the face of the day before the anniversary crisis and in view of the evidence of a potential violence and confrontation in the streets, the Argentine Dialogue appealed citizens for participation in an **Appeal for peace and Dialogue on December 18, 2002**, as a symbol of unity and pacification. This ceremony was supported by citizens and a number of society’s sectors, and showed that the Argentine Dialogue’s mission statement is the maintenance of social peace.

Regarding the **Impact on the Situation**, the priority was that the Argentine Dialogue should respond to the public opinion in two principal matters: hunger and the coming presidential elections. So, it was decided that the table should be divided in two subgroups to plan strategies to be discussed in each question.

The Hunger Table found it necessary to discuss the following matters: a) increase home incomes through a Universal Family Allowance that guarantees the access to the basic food basket gradable depending on the number of children under 18 years old, by elderly person over 65 without social insurance and pregnant women; b) guarantee a comprehensive assistance in the areas of health, nutrition and population development together with the Mother and Child Insurance and other health programs; c) coordinate the activities of civil organizations with the objective of promoting and consolidating the families (health education, child bearing, better food options, etc.) with the existing food and social programs; d) consolidate the provincial, municipal and neighboring Consultant Councils not just in relation to Social Control of the programs but to its impact on local public policies.

¹⁴ Abstracts from the document *La Nación que queremos* from the Argentine Episcopal Conference, which was given at the end of the Extraordinary Plenary Committee, Pilar, Buenos Aires, Argentina, September 28, 2002.

Regarding the electoral process that started in 2003, a participation and awareness campaign was developed through the media, in which the importance of voting in democracy was emphasized, as well as the role that the officials in charge of the polling station would play a role in the election to achieve a transparent electoral process. For that matter a workshop was carried out about the **Impact of the Electoral Process**, where two experts from International IDEA assisted.

On the other hand, members of the Argentine Dialogue held meetings with the officials of different presidential candidates with the objective of offering them a **governance agenda** agreed by the polling stations. These reunions ended with work meetings with the candidates during March-April in San Juan Bautista town, Buenos Aires Province. The candidates that participated in these meetings were as follows: Leopoldo Moreau, Ricardo Lopez Murphy, Adolfo Rodriguez Saa and Elisa Carrió (the candidates Carlos Menem and Néstor Kirchner did not wish to participate).

2.4 Third stage

As a result of an Organizational Learning Workshop in June 2003, whose objective was to study the trial carried out by this group of institutions (professional and civil society organizations) the third stage started. In this Stage, the **Argentine Dialogue** is characterized by the major participation of the civil society with the objective of promoting the efforts to improve and consolidate the consensus, and, in view of the crisis persistence, contributing to restore the conditions necessary to overcome people mistrust of political leaders, and the risk of social disintegration and marginalization. The preservation and enhancement of the Argentine Dialogue is a strategic decision that responds to the intention of channeling the demands of society, restore the common good and promote the necessary actions to encourage the consolidation of the institutional transformations stated in the first dialogue stage and contribute to the transformation of the country demanded by the people, in a coordinated way.

The fourth main denominational institutions (Catholics, Jews, Moslems and Evangelicals) and more than 250 civil society organizations are committed to the Argentine Dialogue. It should be taken into account that the Social Sector Forum gathers 220 institutions of all the country, which are as follows: Caritas Argentina, Lay Office of the Argentine Episcopal Conference [*Departamento de Laicos de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina*], Argentine Jewish Community Association [*Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina AMIA*], Argentine B'nai Brit Institution, Jewish Foundation [*Fundación Judaica - DAIA*], Bethel Community, Islam Difusión House [*Casa de difusión del Islam*], Nacional Christian and Evangelical Council, Argentine Federation of Evangelical Churches, Pentecostal Evangelical Federation Confederation [*Federación Confederación Evangélica Pentecostal*], Christian Alliance Federation of Evangelical Churches [*Federación Alianza Cristiana de Iglesias Evangélicas*], Christian Youth Association. Argentine Baptist Evangelical Convention, Christian Business Leader Association - CBLA, Lázaro Group, Solidarity Network [*Red Solidaria*], CONCIENCIA Association, Social Sector Forum, Civil Power [*Poder Ciudadano*], Intercultural Dialogue Association, El Otro Foundation, AREA, Argentine Engineer Center [*Centro Argentino de Ingenieros - CAI*], Compromiso Ciudadano Foundation, Criterio Magazine, Pedro Poveda Institute, Transparency Social Forum, Civil Open Town Council [*Cabildo Abierto Ciudadano*], Implementation Center of Public Policies for Equity and Development - [*Centro de Implementación de Políticas Pública para la Equidad y el Crecimiento - CIPPEC*], Education and Participation Center, Argentine Workers Center, Argentine Scouts, Public Prosecutors Without

Borders [*Fiscales sin Fronteras*], Argentine Agrarian Federation, Small and Medium-sized Enterprise Association [*Asociación de la Pequeña y Mediana Empresa - APYME*], Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo, Argentine Jewish-Christian Brotherhood, Argentine Catholic Movement [*Acción Católica Argentina*], Fénix Group, Cambio Democrático Foundation, Tomás Moro Group, Argentine Islamic Institution [*Organización Islámica Argentina*], Citizens for the Change, Argentine Native Association - [*Asociación Indígena de la República Argentina - AIRA*], Fundación Grupo Innova Foundation, International Rotary 1890 District, Social and Institutional Development and Analysis Group [*Grupo de Análisis y Desarrollo Institucional y Social - GADIS*]. This staged ended at the end of 2005.

2.5 Evaluation and impact of the Argentine Dialogue in the Transition Process.

a) Main achievements

The Argentine Dialogue has been an unheard-of process of agreement and negotiation, which was characterized by the coordinated participation of the National Government, the Argentine Catholic Church and the United Nations. The dialogue has been realized in the middle of a serious political, institutional and socioeconomic crisis that has affected significantly the social order and pacification and the basic agreements for the social coexistence. As a result of the dialogue, a highly participative process was created. This process found a favorable response in all the institutions and the population; and their proposals were well received by the National Government and Argentine Society. (Noto, 2004)

In analyzing the consequences and impact of this process, it is worth mentioning the main achievements, which are as follows:

- 1. Restoration of dialogue among Argentine people.**
- 2. Contributions to social pacification.**
- 3. Efforts to recover essential values for living in a society. Confidence, Credibility, Solidarity, National Identity.**
- 4. Actions to deal with the social emergency situation and reform the social policy.**
- 5. Promote the Political Reform.**
- 6. Consensus for Reforms.**

- 1. Restoration of dialogue among Argentine people. Building a sphere for legitimate negotiation.**

The Argentine Dialogue was set up in a sphere where all political, economic, social, cultural and religious sectors could express their visions, criticism and proposals, as well as exchanging their points of view and perspectives with other sectors and institutions.

Just the fact of creating a negotiation forum to analyze and suggest solutions as a group is a highly positive achievement. What is more, the dialogue's value and impact

are greater if we consider that it was carried out during one of the deepest crisis that our country has ever been through, and compare its results with previous experiences.

What factors can explain that the dialogue has been possible and the fact that important achievements were reached, especially in the institutional and social spheres? Taking into account all the elements that may explain this process, it is essential to mention two aspects: First of all, the appealing institutions contributed significantly, each in their particular roles, to the building of the proper space to carry out the dialogue. The government promoted the appeal and played an active role in the process management. It seems important to mention the personal interest and commitment of the President of the Nation as a key factor when evaluating the results of the process.

The Catholic Church provided its moral prestige, and experience, as well as its special concern about those in need. Meanwhile, the UNDP provided the organizational and technical support based on their broad experience in negotiation processes and activities associated to human development. Particularly, the presence of both institutions and the performance of its representatives in the Dialogue Table guaranteed objectivity, clear rules, neutrality and commitment to the process which established a **legitimate frame** leading to the participation of all sectors.

On the other hand, it should be emphasized that all institutions appealed, except a few, joined the effort to set up a national dialogue. From diverse political, business, union sectors, civil society institutions, and even “emerging” groups for which this has been the first experience of this kind. Why such diverse sectors committed to the dialogue? There are many factors; but the seriousness of the crisis and the generalized feeling that Argentine society was heading for the social dissolution, the daily demonstrations of anarchy and social anomie, were decisive factors to promote the participation in the process. This sphere was seen as a means that could help significantly end that dissociated process, to become the **“last resort” in the face of the social dissolution** and reach consensus to start to overcome the crisis.

2. Contributions to Social Pacification

The Argentine Dialogue is recognized as a **factor that has contributed to the recovery of social pacification** in view of the situation of anomie, social dissolution, and loss of order that took place since the end of December 2001. It was a stage of important participation, giving rise to new emergent groups, and turning into a sphere where the demands of different sectors were channeled as a result of the emergency.

Under this situation, the Argentine Dialogue depicted a new message, a way of transformation, through sincere dialogue, and the search for alternatives through consensus. It promoted commitment with essential values and common good, the upgrading of the corporative defense of sectorial and individual interests by global concerns, the State policy designs, the institutional reform of policy, justice and the State. Argentine Dialogue inspired confidence in society as a useful tool for overcoming the crisis, as confirmed by the information stated among population and the leaders.¹⁵

¹⁵ Gallup, Mora y Araujo and SEL (*Sociedad de Estudios Laborales*) surveys showed that 49% of population, 42% of leaders and 32% of businessmen were confident that the Argentine Dialogue would contribute to the resurgence of the country (measurement taken in February 2002).

However, this hope in the Argentine Dialogue does not seem to have contributed to the overcoming of the great feeling of rejection by society of the political, business and syndical leaders, as the lack of confidence and a feeling of disappointment due to the breach of agreements, specially banking and monetary agreements. Within this generalized negative perception framework, the Argentine Dialogue was unable, despite its efforts, to delve into public opinion *en masse*, just as shown by the limited knowledge of the population about the initiative, although political leaders were very well informed about it.¹⁶

As days and weeks passed by since the establishment of the new transition government on January 1, 2002, they made progress in social pacification in view of the situation experienced in the first months of the year. However, it should not be forgotten that, as a result of the long recession and the dramatic fall of the financial activity that was intensified since the end of 2001, the unemployment, poverty and destitution situations have deteriorated even more. The social emergency plans boosted by the Argentine Dialogue and the Government (food, sanitary, unemployment subsidies for Heads of Household) contribute to the short term mitigation of the situation –in the middle term the crisis may only be overcome from the economic reactivation and the recovery of employment levels. However, owing to the importance and the seriousness of the crisis, it should be noticed that today there are more than fifteen million of poor people, of which more than six million are unable to meet their basic food needs; the situation is highly unstable, particularly in the main built-up urban areas of the country.

3. Efforts to recover essential values for living in a society: Confidence, Credibility, Solidarity, National Identity

One of the main concerns related to the organizing institutions and the vast majority of the players in the dialogue process was that, given the crisis depth and the social fabric deterioration, the reconstruction of society was essential **starting from restoring the ethical sense of the “Public” and the commitment to the common good**, through a great change in culture, values and paradigms that cover all institutions, either State-owned ones or belonging to the civil society, citizens and its political leaders.

The current serious crisis, characterized as “terminal” and of essentially moral nature has led citizens to lose confidence in institutions and their political leaders. The Argentine Dialogue provided a sphere where a great consensus was consolidated over the need of recreating a number of essential values for living in society. Confidence, Credibility, Solidarity, National Identity.

Confidence in the society plane expressed in the predictability and clarity of the rules of the game. In this plane, the legal security and the respect for private property was recognized as essential. **Credibility**, closely associated with confidence, refers to the integrity and transparency of actions, the fulfillment of promises made. It implies the commitment not to abandon the fight against corruption. **Solidarity** refers to distributive justice as a new element of the social bond among Argentine people that

¹⁶ Ibid. Only 1 out of 10 interviewed at national level and 1 out of 5 in the City of Buenos Aires recognized that they have real knowledge of the Argentine Dialogue. On the contrary, among political leaders, 3 out of 4 interviewed showed a good level of knowledge.

should lead to share fairly the austerity in view of the crisis. **National Identity**, as recovery of the historical roots and a common project of society towards the future.¹⁷

The achievements in this matter are much more difficult to evaluate, particularly in the short term. However, the aim of Argentine Dialogue was the materialization of these values in the boosted reform proposals and processes, both in matters of institutional changes and privilege elimination and definition transformation and social policy management. The search for National Identity is clearly projected with the aim of developing a Country Vision, a shared strategic project.

It should also be admitted that in the framework of the crisis, gestures and attitudes of the dialogue players were recognized as poor, both in relation to the recognition of faults and responsibilities and about solidarity actions. Some gestures that materialize social solidarity in view of emergency were not enough to contribute to the rebuilding of confidence in society and in a common fate as a Nation.

Thus the participating Bishops expressly stated at the **Dialogue Table**: “Crisis is really serious. Our society is seriously fragmented. It is a crisis of confidence and credibility. The population does not feel represented by their political leaders; and at the same time sectors mistrust one another and intend to blame others for what is going on.” Despite this situation, “there are few offers of personal or sectorial resignations.” Therefore, they claimed “the need for gestures and signs that show a sincere wish for real and profound changes from the political, financial, syndical, and business leadership.” The Dialogue Table stated so in the same way: “The country needs: commitments, public and citizen attitudes that, unfortunately have not yet been stated clearly in the Argentine Dialogue Table.¹⁸ “We appreciate the effort that the Dialogue Table is making, but we should remember what we said at the beginning: ‘For Argentine Dialogue to be effective and also hold credibility has to inspire the political, financial, syndical and business leadership to acknowledge the need for gestures and signs that show a sincere wish for real and profound changes.’ ”¹⁹

4. Actions to deal with the emergency and reform the social policy.

In order to restore social peace and reconstruct the social fabric, the Argentine Dialogue recognized as essential to deal with the social emergency, give answers to the most serious situations of social exclusion generated by poverty and destitution, which were worsened by the crisis. Thus, new actions were boosted as regards food and health emergencies and fight against poverty.

But this situation also created the possibility of advancing in the structural reforms of the social policies, designing new mechanisms that incorporate changes from the common values recognized by society, specially transparency and social control that enable the design and participating management of a State policy.

¹⁷ Diálogo Argentino, Procesamiento y Análisis de las Entrevistas: Síntesis de las Entrevistas realizadas en la Fase Preparatoria, March 7, 2002.

¹⁸ See Statements of Bishops Jorge Casaretto, Juan Carlos Maccarone y Ramón Staffolani, January 28 and the Document “*Bases para el Diálogo Argentino*”, January 30, 2002, in *Diálogo Argentino*, Informative Bulletin # 1.

¹⁹ 131ª Reunión de la Comisión Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, *Para que renazca el país*, March 21, 2002.

In this plane, the task performed by the Argentine Dialogue is specially emphasized to implement the *Derecho Familiar de Inclusion Social*²⁰ just as stated by the decree of the National Executive Power that recognizes it.²¹ This right guarantees that every Argentine home enjoys a monthly inclusion income, and that actions are developed in parallel to the aim to reintegrate its holders -unemployed Heads of Household- into the labor market.

The National Government supported passionately this initiative that was materialized with the recognition of the Family Right to Social Inclusion and the launching of the Heads of Household Subsidy Program performed by the same President of the Nation on April 3, 2002. The program was firstly assigned to homes with children under 18 years old, disabled or pregnant women, and consists of the allocation of a monthly 150-peso unemployment subsidy, work training and the integration of beneficiaries into productive projects.²²

This program features generate important impacts on several aspects of public policies.

First, to ensure the program financing of such importance –it is estimated that once implemented completely, it could reach 2 million of direct beneficiaries– the contribution of different sectors was searched through: retentions to agrarian exports, elimination of special pensioner regimes (“privilege pensions”), and the application of income taxes to judges, and savings that will be held from the political reform. In this way, the aim was the materialization of solidarity and equity in view of the crisis, as requiring extra efforts of the economically beneficial sector or releasing resources by privilege elimination or expense cuts. The importance of this program, which could reach 3,600 million *pesos* yearly, will then generate a marked income redistribution that does not only seek social justice, but also contribute to the reactivation of the ruined Argentine economy.

But this initiative has not only been innovative by its conception and scope, but also for its implementation through new mechanisms intended to overcome the shortcomings observed in the social plan execution in the past. In this sense, the constitution of the so-called National Council of Administration, Execution and Control²³ is clearly emphasized. This National Council, which celebrated its preparatory session on April 24 last year, is composed of fifteen members, only three of them represent the National Government (Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security, Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Economy), whereas three represent each one of the following sectors: employees organizations, workers unions, non-governmental organizations and denominational institutions. The Council is chaired by the head of Ministry of Labor, Employment and Social Security and assisted by an Executive Secretariat.²⁴

In that preparatory meeting, the following institutions participated:
Business sector: The Argentine Rural Society, the Coordinator of the Food Product Industries - COPAL/UIA, the Hydrocarbon Exploration and Production Chamber [*Cámara de Exploración y Producción de Hidrocarburos – CEPH*] and the banking

²⁰ *Diálogo Argentino*, Document, “*Derecho Familiar de Inclusion Social*”, March 18, 2002.

²¹ National Executive Power, Decree # 565/2002 - April 3, 2002.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*, Art. 12.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

sector (*ABAPRA* y *ABA*). Syndical Sector: General Confederation of Labor [*Confederación General del Trabajo – CGT*], Argentine Workers Movement [*Movimiento de Trabajadores Argentinos – MTS*] and Argentine Workers Center – [*Central de Trabajadores Argentinos – CTA*] Non Governmental Organizations: Argentine Municipal Federation [*Federación Argentina de Municipios*], Social Sector Forum and Classist and Combative Movement – [*Corriente Clasista y Combativa – CCC*] Denominational Institutions: AMIA, Evangelical Council and National Caritas.

CONAEyC has a number of attributions to administer, carry out and control the program through: implementation policies, beneficiary records, the follow-up and the supervision of resources, the assignation payment modalities, program follow-up of professional and promotion training, and creation of employment for beneficiaries, external evaluation, public diffusion and information to the National Presidency about the implementation, just as making a complaint when irregularities are detected.²⁵

The instrumentation of the *Derecho Familiar de Inclusión Social* through a transparent and participative institutional mechanism involves a structural transformation of the public policies by social control. This statement is clearly ratified when considering the great powers of the National Council and its composition – a minority one for the Government and a majority one for the Civil Society– maintaining the important role of the business sectors that make the main contributions by tax means in order to finance the program and contribute to the implementation of the three syndical centers accounting for workers, and of non-governmental organizations with municipal representation, social and unemployed institutions, and with the participation of the main religious institutions with national assistance and training plans. This democratization of social policies is supported by the so-called municipal Consultant Council, made up similarly of local governmental and non-governmental levels.²⁶ Its proper implementation will surely contribute to the regeneration of confidence in the State and civil society institutions.

Finally, it is important to consider that beneficiaries not only receive a subsidy, but also these resources intended to alleviate the social emergency are accompanied with training and insertion actions in productive projects of the business sector with the aim of creating genuine employment. Thus the business sector makes its effort to improve and integrate unemployed people to the productive circuit. There is no doubt that this integral dimension of the program gives greater legitimacy and acceptance by the beneficiaries and the society as a whole.²⁷

This action, which has relied on a vast society consensus channeled by Argentine Dialogue, is a unique experience in the region. It involves a significant State reform in a crucial area of public policies, with the aim of not only achieving greater effectiveness and equity in the social program distributions, but also obtaining greater transparency, social control and State democratization.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, Art. 13.

²⁶ In case of the Consulting Counsels corresponding to “town halls and neighborhoods” over 25,000 inhabitants, neighboring consulting counsels can be established.” Decree 565/2002, Art. 9.

²⁷ According the results of the survey carried out by the Argentine Dialogue, the population as a whole supports en masse (9 out of 10 interviewed people) that the State contributions to the unemployment solution were channeled through the companies. Argentine Dialogue, Gallup, Mora and Araujo and SEL Surveys, March 2002.

5. *Promote the Political Reform*

The **political and State reform** arose as one of the main priorities presented by players during the days of the dialogue. A broad spectrum of institutions and sectors coincided with the need and urgency of setting out a profound political reform, although there was not always coincidence about the implementation details. However, there was consensus about the reduction of political costs, the improvement of management quality and the shortening of distance among political parties and citizenship.²⁸ Coincidentally, the support for a profound political reform to end the crisis reached 70% of the interviewed among the population.²⁹

Regarding the State Reform, coincidences arose out of effectiveness and transparency objectives in the public expenditure and the recovery of the State authority and control capacity, although there were disagreements about the federal regime reform, presidential reform, the bicameralism at provincial level and the constitutional reform procedures.

In the document “*Bases para el Diálogo Argentino*,” the contents from the consensus in the dialogue with players were specified. “**Boost the political reform** to guarantee the representativeness, legitimacy, proximity and austerity principles.” And the proposal was to adopt measures about financing laws of the political parties and campaigns, commitment with the provinces to restrict the expenditure of the legislative and municipal institutions, limit fixing to government employee salaries, free access to information about public management, authorization of candidates out of political parties.³⁰

Other key components of the institutional-political reform related to the elimination of privileges were the proposals of “abolishing all privilege pensions,” “perform a beneficiary census of gracious pensions” and the “obligation of personal property and income payment” to the judges.³¹

In the face of these demands, important advances were made about the political reform, standing out the signing of “the Federal Agreement for the Political System Reform” by the National Government, and the provincial jurisdictions on February 6, 2002.³² This commitment to reduce political costs involves reducing 25% of the national deputies’ number, as limiting the expenditures of provincial and municipal legislatures, and the governmental structures of all jurisdictions. Also it sets out the unification of elective process every four years, for which the corresponding constitutional reforms are required in provinces, as just for the ones who opt for a unicameral legislative system.

²⁸ *Diálogo Argentino, Procedimiento y Análisis de las Entrevistas: Síntesis de las Entrevistas realizadas en la Fase Preparatoria* March 7, 2002

²⁹ *Diálogo Argentino*, Gallup, Mora y Araujo and SEL (*Sociedad de Estudios Laborales*) surveys. 77% among leaders and 79% among businessmen.

³⁰ Item A.1., Document “*Bases para el Diálogo Argentino*”, January 30, 2002, in the Argentine Dialogue, *Informative Bulletin # 1*

³¹ *Ibid.*, items A.4, A.5 y A.6, respectively.

³² The Agreement was signed by the President of the Nation, 22 Provincial Governors and the Chief of the City Government of Buenos Aires. The only absence was San Luis governor due to discrepancies about the elimination of the industrial promotional regime that benefit a number of provinces: *Catamarca, La Rioja, San Juan* and *San Luis*.

This agreement was favorably evaluated by Argentine Dialogue Table since it means the commitment of the top political spheres of the National Government and Provincial Government with the objectives stated by the Dialogue in this crucial area. It was the first significant governmental act of direct response to the social demands channeled by the Argentine Dialogue.

Laws for consideration of the National Congress should be seen in the same way for the elimination of special pension regimes "privilege pensions," as tax exemptions for judges. Both represent majority claims of the population, and although the lapse for these legislative changes to be carried out usually demand more time than the urgency claims, a prompt final sanction is expected for both legislative initiatives.

From the commitment assumed in the agreement for the political reform, several legislative initiatives have arisen, such as the finance law of the political parties and the simultaneous open internal law that is being considered by the National Congress. Other projects are also being prepared together with the active participation of legislators and representatives of the Executive Power, aimed at modifying the political parties' law (candidatures, affiliations, and partisan organizations) and reducing the number of members of the Deputy Chamber, whose discussions are one of the current legislative priorities. Other instances for the implementation of political reform require executive and legislative actions or constitutional reforms at provincial level that are being adopted gradually in different Argentine provinces.

In the plane of institutional reforms, it could be emphasized that a sectorial table of the Dialogue was not yet made up for the State reform that would have allowed to progress more decisively in the transformation of the state system. Besides, despite the required consensus, the terms of implementation for the political reform, particularly the lack of conclusive gestures to abolish irritating privileges show a marked difference between the urgency of the demands that state the society and the times of the institutional response to make the assumed pledges true.

6. *Consensus for Reforms*

The main objective of Argentine Dialogue, according to the repetitive pronouncements of the President of the Nation and other players, has been to develop the consensus and find basic agreements among the majority of the political, business, syndical forces and institutions of the Civil Society to boost a profound transformation of Argentina. This core objective of the transition period, which is projected beyond December 2003, demands short-, middle- and long-term actions.

Argentine Dialogue works from the first moment to advance in that crucial task, and has intensified its actions during April to achieve the support of the political forces about a number of basic agreements to consolidate the consensus space over the reforms needed in the transition period. Those efforts have been summarized in the document "*Consenso para las Reformas*", in which the main action lines to be taken in order to reach that aim are summarized. (See *Consenso para las Reformas*, page 16).

However, up to now it has not been possible to guarantee that the main political forces get committed to a broad agreement about a basic consensus center for the transition period. Even the proposed framework can offer a common operative base over which the different parties might build different execution options; consensus has

not been reached yet. The dynamic and urgencies of the crisis have turned the interactions among forces and political sectors more complex, as the institutional relations among national authorities –Executive Power - Congress– and these ones with the provincial authorities. Other agreements have been reached, as the 14 items subscribed among the National Executive Power and the majority of the Governors last April 24, but their scope and main objectives seem more limited, when trying to respond mainly to the most immediate demands of the economic crisis and the needs imposed by the negotiation with international financial institutions.

b) Evaluation of the Episcopal Conference about the Argentine Dialogue

The Permanent Commission of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, in its special meeting on January 7-8, 2002, “decided to provide the spiritual environment for the “Argentine Dialogue” and designated three bishops to take part in the Dialogue Table **Monsignor Juan Carlos Maccarone**, Santiago del Estero Bishop; **Monsignor Jorge Casaretto**, San Isidro Bishop and **Monsignor Artemio Staffolani**, Río Cuarto Bishop. That term of office lasted until the carrying out of the plenary meeting of the Argentine Episcopal Conference, developed in San Miguel, Province of Buenos Aires from last April 22 to 27.

During a week characterized by political and economic instability, in which significant changes took place in the National Cabinet, the Episcopal Conference evaluated the experience of the Argentine Dialogue and its participation in that process. Concluding their deliberations, the bishops issued the document “*Testigos del Diálogo*”³³ where they recognized that “during the year 2001 and in many occasions, several social players (government, political parties, business and workers unions, NGOs, citizens) asked for a new intervention to initiate a social dialogue that enables the search for solutions agreed by everybody in view of the crisis that society was undergoing.”

In that document they declared that the Church played a role of “**dialogue witnesses** called by the National Government with the technical support of the United Nations.” And that “the Church, whose presence was officially asked for, stated that it would not participate as another member, but provide a meeting space, in which were vividly and carefully applicable the great own moral values of an authentic dialogue.” Therefore, they emphasize that “the presence of the Church in the citizen dialogue is neither an exercise of political power, nor an attempt to take up a place that it does not belong to it. The presence of the Church seeks the creation of a space for people so as to meet and not confront.”

After revising synthetically the main landmarks of the Argentine Dialogue process, the document recognizes that “the first positive verification has been that most of the citizenship made a clear option for dialogue and not for violence.” But in recognizing that “we have not found the way yet,” the bishops identify in a coherent way with previous pronouncements that “the sectorial and corporative interests are still powerful.” They are the big barriers that hamper the building of the common good. This is the great affliction that suffers the Argentine people.”

³³ Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, Document “*Testigos del Diálogo*”, April 27, 2002

Below they emphasize the breach observed among the consensus and the proposals reached in the Argentine Dialogue, and the reforms and realized changes. “Therefore, the results of the dialogue have not been transformed up to date in the action plan of this new moment of our Nation” And therefore “it is time to real reforms and make great personal and sectorial resignations.”

Directly, the bishops claimed again “leaders has to make gestures so that they are a clear option for the common good,” and they call for a national consensus about the transition reforms that “the Argentine Dialogue submitted to the Executive and Legislative Powers (in) a project of national agreement that, being approved and implemented by means of laws and proper government measures by political forces and governors, might turn into the real foundation of a great change for Argentina.”³⁴

Bishops recognized that “the Argentine Dialogue offered a favorable framework to renew attitudes and habits and that structural reform proposals responding to the initial objective where channeled: restore the country.” They concluded reasserting the responsibility of the leadership: Now it is necessary that those who have the power implement the reforms.”³⁵

As far as the bishops’ concern, they renewed their commitment to the dialogue process: “we state our willingness to continue contributing to the search for ways that enables us to grow as a Nation and create a new project of country.” Thus, the bishops will continue participating in the Argentine Dialogue, although other prelates would alternately take part in, along with three representatives appointed in January and lay people who have already taken an active part in the support teams at the Dialogue Table. They will play a more important role, in the light of the development of more specific follow-up and execution tasks.

Regarding these statements of the Episcopal Conference, it is clear that the bishops recognize how important the Argentine Dialogue has been, but they also clearly identify criticism towards the leadership, particularly as regards the distance among proposals and real achievements. Despite the seriousness of the crisis, or precisely due to the permanent fragility of the country situation, the bishops decided to commit institutionally to the dialogue process, as the only valid way to respond to the wishes and aspirations of all Argentine people that seek a nation whose identity is passion for the truth and a commitment to the common good.³⁶

2.6 Lessons Learnt

- 1) ***Dialogue and handling of the political crisis:*** The greatest accomplishment of the Argentine Dialogue was to have been effective to reduce political violence in a scenario where even the possibility of a “civil war” was mentioned.

³⁴ Ibid., item 11.

³⁵ Ibid., item 12.

³⁶ Ibid.

- 2) ***Dialogue for the formulation of State policies with social consensus:*** The Dialogue also helped to establish a space for issues deliberation in the medium or long term; trying in that way to overcome the sectorial and partisan pushing.
- 3) ***Dialogue and legitimization:*** In the first months of 2002, the Argentine Dialogue provided public institutions with an important backing to its activation, giving support at a moment in which the traditional political players were discredited before the public opinion. In this process, both the denominational organizations –mainly the Catholic Church– and the UNDP were of great importance because they nourish the Argentine Dialogue through ethical content rather necessary in crisis periods and provided the needed impartiality.
- 4) ***Dialogue and the provision of a diagnosis for action:*** The Argentine Dialogue tried to identify the sectorial interests and guarantee proper incentives to reach consensus. The intention was to channel the issues into sectorial tables in order to prevent rather general discussions with no capacity of being translating into proactive agreements.
- 5) ***Demands and expectation expressions:*** The Argentine Dialogue was an exercise for the consolidation of the civil society and its orientated efforts to widen the participation in search of consensus. This consolidation was reflected in a continuous process that contributed to the regeneration of public confidence and reconstruction of the social fabric. Perhaps this was one of the most important results of an exercise of this kind, as it aims to the change of the dominant political culture.
- 6) ***Dialogue and method:*** A dialogue is based on the confidence building among a number of participants. It involves a vast participation, including players with different representativeness and interest levels. They should deal with complex issues and try to decompress those positions that lead to immediate confrontation and threaten to end up in a conflict. The Argentine Dialogue was an exercise to recover confidence in the social fabric after 2001 crisis. It allowed, thanks to this, to make consensus orientated to the application of social policies in order to hold back the crisis and then create discussions with medium- and long-term issues to face structural reforms.

2.7 Conclusions

Firstly, it is important to recognize the effort made by the different players in this process and the institutional and personal commitment of the representatives of the National Government, the Argentine Episcopal Conference and the Program of the United Nations for the Development. Specially, the specific contributions from each

party should be emphasized: the responsibilities assumed by the National Government and the leading role of the President of the Nation; the moral guarantee of the Argentine Church and the professionalism and impartiality of the UNDP for the Development. These contributions represent constitutive elements. Without them, this experience could not have become a reality, not at least with the results achieved.

There should be recognized that the balance of the Argentine Dialogue seems to be highly positive when analyzing and evaluating the consensus and agreements achieved, particularly before the framework of a profound crisis and the lack of confidence and credibility from citizens in institutions. On the other hand, if you measure the real results comparing the importance of the social demands and the destruction level of the social fabric by the emergency, as the depth of the crisis, credibility and confidence in leaders and institutions, the achievements do not seem enough.

The Argentine Dialogue offered the institutional space, acted as a catalyst, which should be accompanied by the leading participation and new attitudes and actions by the players of all areas, as from the number of social and communal institutions. However, the contributions and innovations that this experience has provided to the transition process in favor of the Argentine society reconstruction seem to be highly significant.

When it comes to a global evaluation, **the Dialogue contributions should not be forgotten** as regards the recovery of national dialogue and the contributions to the interests of social pacification and restoration of essential values for the coexistence and reconstruction of the common good and the “Public.”

When revising the process developed by the Argentine Dialogue, it may be recognized that the stages of the exchanges made with the players such as deliberations of sectorial coordination tables have been valuable experiences, learning exercises that have boosted and validated the way for the dialogue as a crucial methodology to solve conflicts and reach main consensus to develop State policies in a democratic society.

This consideration reinforces the conviction that even though the results achieved by the Argentine Dialogue up to now are significant, there are still pending some important tasks and phases to develop the dialogue among Argentine people, and it should finally be incorporated effectively to the institutional and social practice of the democratic process in our country.

Thus, the Argentine Dialogue is **a solid base to boost the efforts even more in order to widen and consolidate the consensus**, to implement the reforms demanded by society, to advance in the joint construction of the State policies, to project a country strategic vision for Argentina.

2.8 Appendix: Document Lists: references:

Documents of the Argentine Dialogue [*Diálogo Argentino*]

Diálogo Argentino, Informative Bulletin #1:

- Message of President Eduardo Alberto Duhalde to the Nation from Santa Catalina de Siena Church, January 14, 2002.
- Message of Monsignor Estanislao Karlic, President of the Argentine Episcopal Conference from Santa Catalina de Siena Church, January 14, 2002.
- Message of Ambassador Carmelo Angulo Barturen, Representative of the United Nations in Argentina in Santa Catalina de Siena Church, January 14, 2002.
- Spokesman's Statements of *Diálogo Argentino*, José Ignacio López subsequent to the meeting with the President Eduardo Duhalde, January 18, 2002.
- Bishops' Statement Jorge Casaretto, Juan Carlos Maccarone and Ramón Staffolani, January 28, 2002.
- *Diálogo Argentino*, *Bases para el Diálogo Argentino*, January 30, 2002.

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Diálogo Argentino, *Memoria y Balance Fases 1 y 2*, Buenos Aires, March 12, 2002

Diálogo Argentino, *Próximas Etapas*, March 12, 2002

Síntesis del Estudio sobre el Diálogo Argentino-Población y Dirigencia, Gallup Argentina Survey (Population Study), SEL, Laboral Study Society (Leaders Study), and Mora y Araujo (Qualitative Study), March 2002

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Diálogo Argentino, *Consenso para las Reformas* Document, April 2002

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Comisión Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, *Diálogo para reconstruir la Patria*, January 7-8, 2002

Comisión Permanente de la Conferencia Episcopal Argentina, *Para que renazca el país*, March 21, 2002

Conferencia Episcopal Argentina , Document “*Testigos del Diálogo*”, April 27, 2002

Speech of Dr. Eduardo Duhalde under the Legislative Meeting when taking office as President of the Nation, January 1, 2002

Federal Agreement for the Political System Reform, February 6, 2002.

Speech of the President of the Nation Dr. Eduardo Duhalde in the Opening of 120° Ordinary Period of the Honorable Congress of the Nation, March 1, 2002

National Executive Power, Decree Number 565/2002 - April 3, 2002

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