

Interrelationship of the current state of U.S. ethnic relations and the Republic of Kazakhstan.
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“The Kazakhstani Model of Interethnic Accord:
experience and recommendations”

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The value of discussing aspects of U.S. ethnic relations is comparative at best. Inspecting and analyzing the actions of one country against another is subjective. To consider ethnic relations it is critical that a broader and very human viewpoint be utilized and maintained. For it is in knowing the sum of our parts that we know a nation’s potential for social equilibrium. It is this point that forms my observations of the current state of U.S. ethnic relations.

In a book by Mr. Gary Althen called American Ways he indicates that there are two sides to the issue of ethnic relations as they pertain to the United States.

- a) What is “In Principle”
- b) What is “In Practice”

In principle we can find strong statements of unequivocal support for equality and a legal framework established to institutionalize it. The phrase, “All men are created equal” (conventional wisdom of political correctness requires saying “all people...”) is a phrase often referred to as an example of the U.S. commitment to the human need for equality and justice. I would label this concept as being a U.S. value but not a norm.

What is in practice varies from the value and forms the day-to-day normative behavior within the nation. As history has clearly indicated the U.S. does try to implement ethnic equality on a daily basis but in practice is much harder to do. For instance the strong sense of the rights of the individual endemic to the U.S. society make it difficult to require and legislate behaviors across all lines of the social strata in the States. You face the same dilemma here in Kazakhstan.

Is the U.S. the world’s leader in ethnic relations solution building, as some of my colleagues would suggest? My professional observation will be to say no. To say the U.S. is the world leader in human rights or ethnic relations ignores the reality as it is offered to us through a review of history and much more importantly current events.

It would be highly unfair not to mention that the U.S. HAS made some significant advancement in ethnic relations that is measurable and easily observable. Regarding the position of the “African-American” population one

can point to Condoleezza Rice and Colin Powell as examples of members of this ethnic group holding high government positions. The importance of this should not be underestimated, for such a thing would not have been remotely possible 15 or 20 years ago.

Looking at employment in the U.S. there are current problems on a broad scale but there is an increase in opportunity for minority applicants. Such opportunities are the result, in part, of increased opportunities in education. Opportunity at any level of the societies structure depends upon the strength of the education available to the members of that society.

Another important factor to look at is the simple shifting of demographics. Take a brief look at California as an example. Not only do they now have an immigrant as a Governor but also their historical minorities are becoming the majority. This is significant in that the same effect is possible in any nation in the not so distant future.

We can see two definite and possibly dangerous trends in the state of ethnic relations in the U.S. and these trends must be addressed in Kazakhstan as well. The first is “cross referencing” the ethnic identity against the national identity. In the States we see this expressed as “African-American”, “Asian-American”, “Hispanic-American” and so on. These people are first and foremost from the States and this is their true identity. By choice, over time, these groups assimilated to the culture of the United States and have become North American. They have long since ceased to be Polish, Irish, African or Swiss.

Diversity is a popular phrase to describe efforts towards understanding and respect among ethnic identities. It is an ill-chosen word for the intent. Diversity, by its very definition means to divide, the term represents division. In practice it is used to set a standard that we MUST respect the ethnic identity of other people. I propose that a different word is needed to clearly describe what is being sought after. We all need to focus our attention on – INCLUSION. This is a far more accurate word for the task to be accomplished.

One strong fear that has been expressed here, and relates to the concept of inclusion is “Globalization”. Will globalization create an atmosphere where ethnic identities in Kazakhstan will be worn down or polluted to the point of being unrecognizable? Ethnic identity is not lost, nor is it taken from you. People give away their ethnic identity. Globalization is NOT in and of itself the enemy of any one or collective set of ethnic identities. The real enemy is false perception, false nationalism, and ethnocentrism. Someone needs to convince me that there is some overriding, universal truth that sets the people of Uzbekistan above Kazakhs or Kazakhs above Georgian, or any group of people you wish to discuss.

One ethnic minority set that requires further interaction from the people of Kazakhstan is the expatriate community. They are guests, they are foreigners, yet they live and work here. This then requires your attention to the quality of

that relationship – or as I suggest, the lack of any substantive relationship! It may indeed be prudent to consider having a conference that focuses on the declining condition of expatriate and resident community relations. A recent BBC investigation of success in international business concluded that organizations that form relationships abroad do better business for longer periods of time. At this time it appears that in Kazakhstan we maneuver each other for advantage and do little to form a real relationship and a “partnership for progress”!

A refocus of the issue at hand is needed. All humans wish to wear a label, to be a part of some group. As I indicated previously, ethnic relations are based upon perceptions, both good and bad. The perceptions we hold of others need to be challenged and scrutinized constantly. The purpose of this conference is to deal with an important and worthy problem. Do any of us really need to “deal” with each other?

We all will reap a greater benefit if we become focused upon common human dignity instead of trying to redefine ethnic relationships! There are similarities among all humans that form the basis for relationships and clearer understandings – the differences between cultures and ethnic groups create the opportunity for learning!

The foundation for a new perspective and the answers you seek for a new Kazakhstan may very well already be in your grasp. My observation is that there are strong words of wisdom found in the writings of Abai. Allow me to paraphrase something he expressed: Life is like a wall, and each of us are bricks seeking to find our place in that wall.

Let us look at each other as the bricks that Abai speaks of – bricks that when joined together can create the wall that is the strength of Kazakhstan.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Stephen G. Wright". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name.

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and Strategic Communications

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