



**tous différents**  
**tous é g a u x**  
**herkes farklı**  
**herkes eşit**  
**all different**  
**all equal**



**Symposium**  
**Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue**  
**in Youth Work**

Istanbul, Turkey, 27-31 March 2007

DJS/EYCB/camp/IRD/2007/18

Budapest, 4 April 2007

## ISTANBUL YOUTH DECLARATION

### on Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue in Youth Work

We, the participants of the symposium on Inter-Religious and Intercultural Dialogue in Youth Work, met in Istanbul from 28 to 31 March 2007 within the framework of the 'All Different - All Equal' European youth campaign for diversity, human rights, and participation.

The 'All Different – All Equal' campaign is an integral part of the Action Plan of the Council of Europe's Summit of Heads of States and Governments in Warsaw 2005, which states that "to promote diversity, inclusion and participation in society, we decide a Europe-wide youth campaign...". The campaign is run by the co-managed youth sector of the Council of Europe in cooperation with the European Youth Forum and is supported by the European Commission. The campaign is based on the work of the National Campaign Committees in the member states of the Council of Europe to ensure wide synergies and mobilisation for the campaign at the local, national and regional levels.

Our campaign is firmly anchored within the framework of indivisible, inalienable and universal human rights. Every human being has a fundamental right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, which includes the freedom "to manifest one's religion or belief in

teaching, practice, worship and observance,” as outlined in the European Convention on Human Rights. Young people and policy-makers, realising the importance of religions, beliefs and cultural freedoms, initiated the idea of a symposium on inter-religious and intercultural dialogue in Istanbul.

We, young people coming from member states of the Council of Europe and the Organisation of Islamic Conference, gathered here to discuss and promote mutual respect and social inclusion, to propose ways in which inter-religious and intercultural dialogue can be further developed, to exchange ideas and to share practices.

We have developed the following recommendations:

- Governments and other decision makers should introduce intercultural and inter-religious education and dialogue in educational institutions in order to foster more tolerant, understanding and participative values in society, creating an adjustment to multicultural environments.
- In order to overcome religious-based discrimination and phobias, national governments, institutions and non-governmental organisations should promote diversity in educational programmes and school systems starting at early age, and devise their programmes in a diverse way. School policies should be more inclusive and promote trust, dialogue and knowledge about diversity. This should be ensured through curriculum and teacher training, both in formal and non-formal education, by proposing different viewpoints representative of all groups, ethnicities and religions.
- Active participation of youth organisations from all religious, ethnic and cultural backgrounds in public debates and policy-making should be stimulated and facilitated and their visibility in the public sphere should be raised.
- Decision-makers should support civil society in recognising the existence of faith-based youth organisations that respect the universal human rights and democratic values. They should accept them and take their views into consideration.
- We recommend supporting the creation of international youth media networks to promote co-operation and exchange of knowledge, experiences and views. We call upon national governments and international institutions to support the creation of online youth media news sources. Under the banner of respect for human rights and democracy, these networks would provide the possibility for an interactive and non-partisan exchange of news and views. We encourage all governments to provide the necessary infrastructure to enable access to these networks for everyone.
- Taking into account that, as actors of change, we, young people, can influence society on a long-term basis, we demand that local, national and international institutions support youth activities dealing with conflict transformation in order to prevent new conflicts. We insist that international and national non-governmental organisations specialised in conflict and post-conflict transformation, dialogue, peace and human rights education, take a more active role in supporting youth work.

- We urge and demand all stakeholders, including authorities, civil society, religious communities and media, to increase their focus on and sensitivity towards the importance of dialogue, especially intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, to prevent all forms of discrimination and violence, rather than to fuel them.
- Governmental institutions should guarantee and non-governmental organisations should promote equal access to all social services and active participation of young people by addressing the root causes of discrimination based on gender, ethnic background, religion, culture, age, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities (etc.).
- Racism and discrimination remain worrying realities that have an impact on people of all ages, and spread under different guises. Abstract language, selective hearing, historical relationships, cultural hegemony and denial of problems create parallel realities that are only forced together by extraordinary events. This creates institutional double standards and apathy. Institutions need to strengthen their relevance by meeting the practical needs of diverse communities.
- Diverse societies and the benefits they bring should be appreciated rather than feared and rejected. Innovative formal and non-formal educational activities that encourage direct communication between different cultural groups need to be developed and supported on a long-term basis. This work needs to be strengthened by multi-disciplinary critical perspectives that can inform the work of minority communities. This can only happen in a context where states and societies respect and apply human rights and where their violations are effectively sanctioned.
- The Council of Europe, the European Union, the United Nations and the Organisation of Islamic Conference should encourage their member states to include media education (especially the development of critical approaches) in formal school curricula, and, in the context of life-long learning, to encourage the use of non-formal education and peer-to-peer education on media.
- The Council of Europe and the European Union should develop educational resources and projects aiming at respecting religious, cultural and ethnic diversity suitable for formal and non-formal education. This process should be similar to the one on revision of history books.
- We support the United Nations' Alliance of Civilizations Initiative and we appreciate its focus on youth as a priority area. We also support the 'Youth for the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative' proposed by the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme Special Unit for South-South Cooperation, the Council of Europe and the Islamic Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation. We call upon the organisers to ensure the participation of youth of different backgrounds in all activities under these initiatives, including the centrepiece inter-generational conference.

- We call for greater publicity and dissemination of information about the objectives of the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative through media, the Internet, entertainment and sports activities. A focus on academic and educational fields, in particular the development of research on the 'Alliance of Civilizations', is needed.
- We stress the necessity of following up the 'Youth for the Alliance of Civilizations Initiative' and we recommend that it should be integrated with the follow-up of this symposium and be called the 'Istanbul Youth Process for Intercultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue'.
- Local authorities should raise awareness of the diversity within their communities, in order to develop local policies which support the intercultural and inter-religious initiatives of non-governmental organisations.
- Local authorities should be encouraged to develop structures to bring together representatives of different religious and cultural communities, developing programmes and activities at the local level.
- Local authorities should take all necessary measures to enable the participation of all groups (based on gender, ethnic background, religion, age, socio-economical status, sexual orientation, physical and mental abilities, etc.) in local decisions, as a fundamental principle of participative democracy. Local authorities should be supported budget-wise and information-wise to be able to fulfil these measures.
- As potential agents of change in inter-faith dialogue, faith-based youth organisations (religious and non-religious) should promote respect for each other and facilitate the process of living in diversity, both at local and international levels, and foster their interaction with other kinds of youth organisations and activities.
- Non-governmental organisations and religious communities should cooperate with schools, media and governmental institutions to motivate non-organised young people to engage in community-based intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, with the aim of promoting diversity and, specifically, fighting the rise of religious based discriminations (Islamophobia, Antisemitism, Christianophobia, etc).
- Learning programmes for youth that address the phenomena of radicalism, terrorism, extremism and the economy of fear should be developed.
- Media has a trigger effect on Islamophobia, Antisemitism, Christianophobia and other forms of discrimination. In this respect it is crucial to include the media in intercultural and inter-religious dialogue processes, and to raise awareness of sensitive and responsible journalism which avoids enflaming hatred against belief, faith or human dignity, while upholding the freedom of speech.

As young people, who are convinced that diversity, human rights and participation need to be continuously reinforced, we are committed to the aims of the European youth campaign 'All Different – All Equal'. Therefore, we will contribute with creative actions, outreach

activities and youth projects in our countries and we will devote our motivation, energy, skills, competences and strong beliefs to promote the universal human rights and values.

Hence, we call on all decision-makers and international institutions, governmental and non-governmental organisations to join these efforts and provide support to make this campaign successful in changing mentalities, attitudes and policies.

We recognise that addressing the issues above is a process that requires commitment both by young people and the respective authorities. Therefore we call on local, national, European and international institutions to support the process of dialogue initiated with this symposium in Istanbul organised by the Council of Europe, supported by the Directorate General of Youth and Sports of Turkey, the Turkish Folk Dancing Federation and the European Commission, and co-organised with the Islamic Conference Youth Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation.