

Press Release

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PACE President calls for churches and other confessional organisations to receive official status with the Council of Europe

Strasbourg, 07.09.2006 – In his speech at an international conference on inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in Nizhny Novgorod (7 and 8 September) Council of Europe Parliamentary (PACE) President René van der Linden today called for churches and other confessional organisations to receive an official status with the Council of Europe. "There is absolutely no reason why they should not officially have a status similar to that which has been granted to non-governmental organisations, taking into account their specificities," he said.

"The political and legal action of the Council of Europe must be reinforced by co-operation with these institutions. Through their moral and ethical commitment and the values they uphold, they are active players in civil society and valid partners in our democratic societies. We must work together for peace, social justice and long term stability, thus under-cutting the root causes of terrorism," he pursued. "The concrete fields of our co-operation should cover respect for fundamental human values, family values, children's rights, social cohesion, fighting social segregation between religious, ethnic and racial groups, encouraging integration in our societies, combating AIDS," he said.

President van der Linden, in particular, stressed the need to fight poverty and exclusion. "Thousands die of hunger every day, including children, a terrible reminder of our failure to ensure decent living conditions for millions on this planet. Charity and solidarity must guide our common action for human dignity", he added.

Mr van der Linden reminded some 300 government representatives, parliamentarians, experts and high representatives from religious communities across Europe that the Treaty of the European Union establishing a Constitution for Europe had recognised the important role of churches and religious organisations in contributing to the process of European integration.

He recalled that PACE is an ideal and natural forum for inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue as it brings together national parliamentarians from 46 member states representing the wide political, social, geographical as well as cultural and religious diversity of Europe. His long-term objective is not only to offer the tribune of the Assembly to dignitaries of different religions to promote tolerance and mutual understanding, but to establish a permanent framework for pan-European meetings with representatives of different religions.

He finally thanked the Russian Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers for having organised this conference together with the 46-nation Organisation, underscoring that these themes still received too little attention from politicians.

[Full speech](#)

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).