

Press Release

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Five years after 9/11: winning hearts and minds will make us safer

Strasbourg, 11.09.2006 – René van der Linden, President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), today made the following statement:

"Five years ago today, the world stopped. A handful of deranged men, doing what they thought was the will of God, murdered over three thousand people in a monstrous event designed for the television age. We will never forget. Above all else, we acknowledge and mourn the loss of the families touched by that day.

But we must move on. Their loss is the spur to our work: we must do everything in our power to prevent such grief recurring. That means resolutely tracking and bringing to justice the perpetrators of such acts, and vigilance and determination in preventing further attacks.

But this difficult work must be done within the tried and tested framework of international and human rights law – or it will not make us safer. I have no doubt that interrogating suspects using 'alternative procedures' in secret locations beyond the law – official US government policy as of this week – will not make Americans safer in the long run. It is in America's interest to end this practice now.

Yet there is another vital, if less headline-grabbing, element in the work of making us safer: winning hearts and minds. Inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue – encouraging nations, cultures and faiths to learn about, and from each other – has always been a major part of the Council of Europe's work.

So on this sad day, on behalf of the victims of 9/11 and other atrocities since, I want to make an appeal on behalf of one neglected asset in the long battle against terrorism: human understanding."

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).