

Press Release

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2008 Council of Europe meeting on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue

Strasbourg, 09.04.2008 – "The Council of Europe has taken a useful initiative – and one which is particularly valuable at a time when our European societies are becoming increasingly intercultural," said Professor Jean-Paul Willaime, General Rapporteur, at the end of the meeting on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue held in Strasbourg on Tuesday 8 April.

Professor Willaime stressed the utility of this dialogue between religious believers and humanists, focused on clear aims, based on the values embodied in the Council's texts and held on its premises. He added: "The Council of Europe embodies a secular approach of which intelligence and dialogue are the key elements – an approach which belongs to all Europeans. It is working on the treatment of religion and belief in state schools for children from all backgrounds, in a way which fully respects the freedom of conscience of pupils and parents and excludes all discrimination".

Professor Willaime added that the Council of Europe was particularly well equipped to devise the ethical and epistemological framework needed for pluralist, well informed handling of these issues in the classroom. It could also help to give teachers training which would ensure that their approach was firmly grounded in education for democratic citizenship.

"Dialogue based on, and respectful of, the universal values the Council of Europe is mandated to protect - in particular those enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and developed by its case-law - can help us to improve understanding, reduce tensions and increase mutual respect within and between our European societies. It can help us to make Europe, and the world, a better and safer place to live," said Maud de Boer-Buquicchio, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Fiorenzo Stolfi, Minister of Foreign Affairs of San Marino and chairman of the meeting, concluded: "In the last sixty years, intercultural dialogue has increasingly become a practical necessity; social cohesion, peace and justice depend on its succeeding on all levels - local, national and international".

The meeting was organised on a trial basis to promote and strengthen the values of the Council of Europe, and foster mutual respect, knowledge, tolerance and understanding in European society. The Committee of Ministers will receive a summary at its session in Strasbourg on 7 May, and will decide in due course on any further action to be taken.

[For more information](#)

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