



(English only)

Annual High-level Tripartite meeting between the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the United Nations and partner organisations

Joint Communiqué

1. High-level representatives of the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the United Nations met on 7 July 2008 in Strasbourg for their annual consultations in the “Tripartite-Plus” format.¹

2. The participating organisations discussed different aspects of intercultural dialogue and their collaboration in this area, particularly the role of human rights, the promotion of intercultural competences through education as well as the link between intercultural dialogue and conflict prevention.

3. *Participants* emphasised that the promotion of intercultural dialogue and the management of cultural diversity, based on universal human rights, minority rights and effective integration policies that respect minority identities within states, the principles of democracy and the rule of law, remained among the priorities of their organisations. They agreed that intercultural dialogue could help in formulating responses to current challenges and underlined that such dialogue needed a supportive political environment, aimed at greater social justice and characterised by a strong role for civil society, and that it could be facilitated by the cultural and media industry.

4. *Participants* welcomed that the international community had recently developed several initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue at all levels, addressing a wide range of policy areas and institutional settings. They highlighted in particular:

- The high-level dialogue on inter-religious and intercultural understanding and cooperation for peace convened by the General Assembly of the United Nations in October 2007; the “Alliance of Civilisations” initiative under the auspices of the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the manifold activities launched in the areas of education, youth, media and migration at regional and global level; and the panel on intercultural dialogue on human rights held by the Human Rights Council during its seventh session in March 2008.
- The activities of the OSCE institutions and field operations for the promotion of intercultural dialogue, by developing various educational and awareness raising tools and guidelines, organising joint roundtable discussions and trainings for civil society and members of different communities to facilitate the exchange of good practices, the transfer of knowledge and experience, and by building coalitions on specific topics.
- The initiatives of the Council of Europe in various areas including the publication of the “White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue” (“Living Together As Equals in Dignity”) launched by its Committee of Ministers in May 2008, which provides a conceptual framework and a guide for policy-makers and practitioners.

5. *Participants* agreed that human rights — civil and political as well as economic, social and cultural rights, together with minority rights and integration policies which respect diversity — provide the essential value basis for intercultural dialogue within democratic societies. They confirmed human rights as the most important force of social cohesion, providing standards for freedom, justice, equality and solidarity. Participants stressed their

¹ The meeting was the 17th in a series initiated in July 1993. The annual discussions – which are chaired and hosted in turn by the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the Council of Europe (CoE) and the United Nations Office at Geneva (UNOG) on behalf of the United Nations – are intended to share information and improve practical cooperation by drawing on each other’s expertise and know-how. Over time, the agenda has widened, from an essentially humanitarian emphasis, to fields related to human rights, conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict peace building. The number of participating organizations has also increased, so that consultations are informally referred to as the “Tripartite-plus” process. The European Commission (EC), the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who participate as affiliated members, have been joined for this meeting by the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO). A wide range of representatives from the UN system – including Secretariat departments and offices, and the funds, programmes and specialised agencies – also participated.

conviction that governments must take appropriate measures to secure an environment conducive to intercultural dialogue and equal enjoyment of human rights by all. This included an obligation to avoid all forms of discrimination. Participants considered that there was a strong link between combating racism and promoting a democratic society based on respect for diversity.

6. *Participants* reiterated the important role of education for the promotion of intercultural dialogue. They underlined that public authorities, civil society, religious communities, the media and all other parts of society should contribute to fostering among all age groups—but particularly the young generation—the attitudes, knowledge and skills that enabled individuals to live together peacefully in multicultural societies and to benefit from their richness. Education could help to promote openness towards other cultures, mutual comprehension, respect for diversity and a better awareness of one's own culture. The teaching of democratic citizenship, human rights education and language learning in schools and exchange programmes were among the most important contributions that formal and non-formal education could make.

7. *Participants* agreed that intercultural dialogue could contribute significantly to the prevention and resolution of conflicts. They underscored the paramount importance of using existing mechanisms of peaceful settlement of disputes as part of conflict prevention. They also stressed the role of international instruments to combat terrorism and called upon States to encourage inter-religious and cross-cultural dialogue with a view to reducing tension and, in this manner, helping to prevent terrorist offences. They underscored the continuing need to address the conditions conducive to radicalization and the spread of terrorism, while seeking to intercept and prosecute terrorists and counter terrorist networks.

8. *Participants* agreed that due attention should be given to the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue. They stressed that religious institutions and organisations could significantly contribute to the peaceful settlement of conflicts. Any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence was dangerous and unacceptable. Culture and religion must not be abused as a justification for preventing individuals from exercising their basic rights or from participating actively in society.

9. *Participants* declared their determination to strengthen co-ordination and co-operation between them in the area of intercultural dialogue, and discussed additional opportunities for joint action in the field of human rights protection, education and conflict prevention, including the following subject areas:

- Strategies to address the human and minority rights questions facing Europe's multicultural societies, including aspects relating to legislation, monitoring, awareness-raising and education;
- Education for democratic citizenship, human rights education and the teaching of facts on religions and beliefs;
- Measures to combat radicalisation and to strengthen the prevention of terrorism, in particular through development of initiatives and programmes aimed at promoting tolerance and mutual respect for peoples from other cultures, religions and beliefs.

10. It was agreed that the next Tripartite Meeting would be hosted by the United Nations in 2009.