

Press Release

Parliamentary Assembly Communication Unit

Ref: 073a06

Tel: +33 3 88 41 31 93

Fax :+33 3 90 21 41 34

pace.com@coe.int

internet: www.coe.int/press



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PACE President on controversy over caricatures: 'Rights come with responsibilities – but violence is never ever justified'

Strasbourg, 09.02.2006 – Referring to the controversy and violent response to Danish caricatures in several countries worldwide, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) President René van der Linden said today that there cannot be a democratic society without the fundamental right to freedom of expression and information, but underlined that freedom of thought, conscience and religion constitutes one of the essential freedoms of individuals.

Mr van der Linden, who is paying an official visit to Greece at the invitation of the Speaker of Parliament Anna Benaki, said: "Democratic pluralism and tolerance require that the religion and beliefs of individuals are fully respected. Rights come with responsibilities. In a globalised world where information travels so fast, the media should be aware of its impact on millions and millions of people. Everywhere, they should use their power to cultivate peace and understanding, as well as respect for what other cultures and religions hold most sacred," the President said.

"We must not abuse our liberties with such insensitivity that tolerance of free speech becomes intolerance of diversity. These events have made it painfully clear that there is a lack of common understanding of the basic values enshrined in the Council of Europe, a lack of understanding of cultures and religions other than one's own. There are prejudices and misunderstandings, but these can never ever justify violence. I express my full solidarity with the Danish people and other fellow-Europeans who are being subjected to totally unacceptable attacks", he stated.

"It is most important to exchange experiences and information. We need to build on a continuous dialogue and learn to appreciate the diverse cultures and religions around us. The Assembly brings together politicians of every creed and culture in Europe. It is thereby able to act as an important forum for intercultural and inter-religious dialogue. We are only at the very beginning of such a dialogue and it is my firm intention to develop to the fullest extent the Council of Europe's great potential in this field," he concluded.

During his official visit, Mr van der Linden met the President of the Republic, the Speaker of the Parliament, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. This afternoon, he will address a joint meeting of the Greek Parliament's Defence and Foreign Affairs, European Affairs and Justice Committees.

[Speech](#)

Press contact:

Francesc Ferrer, PACE Communication Unit, mobile: +33 6 30 49 68 22

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: Bruno Haller.

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).