

Healing Memories and Facing the Future

Mar 16, 2008 | Statement

European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL)

Council Meeting 2008: Statement on Healing Memories and Facing the Future

(1) The European Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace, meeting in Berlin for its annual council meeting 3 to 5 March 2008 addressed the theme “Healing memories and facing the future: The role of religions in a dialogue of cultures”. Our venue – Berlin – reminds us of some of the most important moments of European history. A few decades ago the symbol of European division, it is now a symbol of new beginnings.

(2) We have visited Synagogues and listened to representatives of the Jewish community witnessing to their past and present: Their dignity, strength and faith, and their suffering in the past and challenges in the present. Convinced that all religious groups should offer each other solidarity, we see a line from our addressing the situation of the Muslim community in our 2007 council meeting to our focusing on the Jewish community at this meeting.

(3) Anti-semitism is not only a problem for the Jews but for society as a whole. It remains a reality in Europe, although the face of anti-semitism may be changing. Demonising and discrimination of Jews is contrary to the values of all the religions which we represent. As religious leaders we acknowledge our responsibility to address such tendencies, especially if they occur within our own faith communities.

(4) Remembering the past is a feature of most religions. The present is affected by what we remember and how we remember. Also when religions preach forgiveness, healing and new beginnings, the past remains with us. Healing can be achieved when memories are healed, when we remember in a different way. This can be difficult. Sometimes such

healing processes must imply both the naming of the past, the confession of guilt, forgiveness and reparations.

(5) Our meeting takes place as the issue of the cartoons of the Prophet Mohammed again is hotly debated. In this situation we confirm our full endorsement of the statement by the Executive Committee on 6 February 2006 that criticised as unnecessary the printing of offensive cartoons and also condemned threats and violence in the wake of their publication.

(6) We take note of the statement by the UN special rapporteurs on religious freedom that “international human right law protects primarily individuals in the exercise of their freedom of religion and not religions per se [...] Freedom of religion primarily confers a right to act in accordance with one’s religion, but does not bestow a right for believers to have their religions itself protected from all adverse comment” (A/HCR/2/3). We also hear the opinion of those who insist that states, as many of them do, should protect the places of worship, holy sites, and symbols respected by the followers of different religions including minorities.

(7) 2008 has been declared the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. We have benefited from the presence and contributions of representatives from the EU, the Council of Europe and the OSCE, and heard reports of the efforts made by Slovenia as they hold the EU presidency. We encourage these organisations as well as national governments to give ample space for religion within their concept of intercultural dialogue, and to strengthen the efforts for dialogue also in the years to come. As one contribution we have offered our principled understanding of interreligious dialogue when we adopted the *Berlin Declaration on Interreligious Dialogue*.

(8) At our meeting we were joined by a delegation of representatives from the Muslim community in Kosovo, the Roman Catholic Church in Kosovo and the Serbian Orthodox Church. We benefited from their honest sharing of their understandings of the present situation. All people of Kosovo have experienced hurt and pain. We noted a shared commitment to ensure peaceful coexistence among all religious communities in Kosovo, and a willingness to promote this through further interreligious dialogue. The European Council of Religious Leaders – Religions for Peace, as an interreligious organisation and independent of nation states, will continue to support initiatives for dialogue in Kosovo and stand ready to facilitate further efforts aimed at establishing justice, peace and reconciliation.