

2018 North-South Prize Award Ceremony

Remarks by the Chair of the Executive Committee of the North South Centre, Ambassador Javier Gil Catalina

Lisbon, 7 May 2018

Mr President of the Portuguese Republic,

Mr President of the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic,

Madam Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe,

Madam Vice President and Head of the Portuguese Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe,

Right honourable members of the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic,

Distinguished winners of the North-South Prize,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After witnessing the carnage caused by the battle of Solferino in 1859, Henri Dunant, a young Genevan businessman, called for an organization to take care of all wounded soldiers, no matter in which of the belligerent armies they had fought.

As is well known, this appeal was the origin of the Red Cross, whose International Committee was created four years later in Geneva.

Joëlle Kuntz, a Swiss Journalist, wrote that:

“Dunant was flying in the face of the triumphant nationalism of the day by championing the universal cause of all victims of war.”

Strikingly – but also ominously- the threat of nationalism (coupled with populism and xenophobia) is again the order of the day in Europe one hundred and fifty years later.

Gripped by the fear and the feeling of insecurity instilled in them by the consequences of the Great Recession , many Europeans fall prey to the lure of simplistic explanations of - and demagogic solutions to - their predicament.

As the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Mr. Thorbjørn Jagland recently pointed out:

“Findings show the growing influence of xenophobic and populist rhetoric in public opinion. We continue to observe a surge in hate speech, often enhanced through a malevolent use of new technology.”

Our organization, the Council of Europe, bears a special responsibility and has a particularly important role to play in the struggle against this dangerous threat to democracy, a threat which has proven lethal to Europe on several occasions throughout contemporary history.

One of the instruments at the disposal of the Council of Europe in this fight to defend the values it upholds is the North-South Prize.

It is particularly gratifying to be gathered here today in the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic in order to honour two distinguished personalities belonging to the Red Cross, who like Henri Dunant, stand for the defence of universal values in diversity. Two personalities who have dedicated their lives to promoting humanitarian work and fostering human solidarity. Two personalities, in sum, who are a beacon in the midst today's crisis of values.

Bearing this in mind, the Jury decided last autumn to award Ms. Kriistina Kumpula and Dr. Abbas Gullet the 2017 North –South Prize.

Ms. Kumpula is the Secretary General of the Finnish Red Cross. She has made an extraordinary contribution to the North-South dialogue by promoting health and social rights both in Finland and in East Africa.

Dr. Gullet was instrumental in turning the Kenya Red Cross Society into a leading member of the Movement and a shining example in the African continent.

My warmest congratulation to both of you.

Para finalizar, desejaria agradecer a Portugal, país unido por tantos conceitos a Espanha, o seu contínuo apoio ao Premio Norte-Sul que hoje comemora a sua vigésima terceira edição.

Muito obrigado