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Address by Jean-Michel Caudron, representative of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe at the 2017 Council of Europe Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, Strasbourg, 6 November 2017

1

## ***10 years of intercultural dialogue! And now...***

Ladies and gentlemen,

First of all, my thanks to the Committee of Ministers for giving the Conference of INGOs the opportunity to make its contribution to the 2017 high-level Exchange.

I would remind you that the Conference of INGOs comprises 288 INGOs holding participatory status.

I wish to congratulate the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on migration and refugees on the discussion paper on these issues drawn up as a basis for the discussions at this Exchange.

The paper rightly points out that integration is a more complex process than the reception of displaced persons.

**While it presents three (*relatively academic*) approaches to integration (*political assimilation, functional assimilation and multicultural integration*), that still does not provide the keys as to how to live together on a relatively sustainable basis in post-migration European society.**

What would be the cost of putting all these refugees and migrants back into the boats that brought them and sending them to their home countries?

Is it not in the overriding interest of our European society to benefit from the skills, the entrepreneurial ability and the resilience of these people, in particular those from higher social and occupational backgrounds?

Unfortunately, in spite of their baggage of skills, once they arrive in Europe, many fail to have their qualifications recognised and suffer discrimination or encounter difficulties in entering the labour market. We therefore cannot but support schemes such as the European Qualifications Passport for Refugees implemented under the Building Inclusive Societies action plan on the basis of the Council of Europe's Lisbon Recognition Convention.

Properly integrated refugees and migrants are a good investment both for our socioeconomic development and for theirs. If the best possible conditions are established for their reception and personal fulfilment, they will in future serve as links and facilitators of closer ties between peoples once peace, fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law have been restored in their countries of origin. Remittances to their families in those countries will further their economic development. Of course, our development aid and the neighbourhood policy programmes must be carried forward in order to underpin the process. Our interest in having peace, prosperity and democratic security throughout Europe's neighbourhood is also at stake here.

In the case of migrant children, should we not be forward-looking in the way we deal with them and address the trauma of their journeys into exile so as to prevent them feeling excluded from their host societies in 15 or 20 years' time and being radicalised and turning to violence? Would it not be wise to start work straightaway on strengthening a contract between generations and cultures? The FMDO (*Federation of Moroccan Democratic Organisations, INGO holding participatory status*) arranged a visit by the Conference of INGOs and the Intercultural Cities department of the Council of Europe to Molenbeek on 7 December 2016 following the Brussels terror attacks of 22 March 2016. The aim was to show that Molenbeek was a place where people lived together and did things together, while also highlighting that the Muslim community was doubly penalised by the attacks (*firstly, because many of the victims were Muslims and, secondly, because of the subsequent ostracising of the community's young people, who were presented as potential terrorists*). Since then, local civil society players have been working towards establishing a European network of towns for the sustainable development of the social contract between generations and cultures as a means of preventing the risks of radicalisation.

The findings of the study published recently by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) show that the issue of the integration of Muslims is much debated; three-quarters of those living in Europe say they are "attached" to the country where they live and demonstrate a high level of trust in its institutions, even though over a third considered that they had suffered discrimination on account of their origins. The FMDO, the Upper Normandy Regional Council of the Muslim Faith and the Normandy branch of the CFDT trade union have therefore joined together in the participatory drafting and then promotion of a citizens' participatory manifesto for promoting peace between cultures and convictions (modelled on the Nouméa Accord). The aim is to mobilise civil society in a reflection of its cultural and generational diversity through intercultural dialogue meetings held in different venues of symbolic significance with a view to fostering peace between cultures and convictions.

**It is suggested in the discussion paper prepared by the Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on migration and refugees that accommodation of different religious needs may be better addressed if translated into secular terms. But should we talk about "religious needs", which is an open-ended concept and therefore is hard to implement? Should we not instead start out from a rights-based approach, which would be less questionable because it is founded on internationally binding instruments?**

This is a working method based on internationally recognised human rights. The rights-based approach entails the target groups being regarded as "right holders" with rights recognised by law and government institutions not being mere service providers but acting as responsible bodies which are required to ensure that human rights are upheld. Of course, obligations also come with rights.

There are questions hanging over the long-term future of the Council of Europe's principles of respect for fundamental rights, democracy and the rule of law in many countries throughout the world and even in Europe. Implementing Action No. 12 of the EU's Action

Plan on Human Rights and Democracy (2015-2019) with a view to “Promoting and Protecting Freedom of Religion or Belief” also remains a challenge.

A rights-based approach seems necessary in order to ensure effectiveness in terms of well-being for all. It makes it possible to go beyond an approach based on moral principles, which could be interpreted as moralistic or even neo-colonialist in some quarters. Especially since, while humanist values are universal in that they form the foundation of the human community, interpretations of them may vary or even be exploited for petty political or populist purposes.

The UN Human Rights Committee’s General Comment No. 22 explains the interpretation of Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights: “*[it] protects theistic, non-theistic and atheistic beliefs, as well as the right not to profess any religion or belief. The terms ‘belief’ and ‘religion’ are to be broadly construed*”.

3

Under this rights-based approach, we would see the role of cultural, religious and belief groups in welcoming at local level migrants and refugees arriving from countries where solidarity is still in-built or organic.

After all, while European states have a duty to provide a basic social safety net, is it not primarily up to the local community to start the process of solidarity? The reception of 1.3 million refugees in Germany was initiated by citizens, parishes, associations and citizens’ foundations (*local foundations employing crowd-funding to develop projects for migrants*) and subsequently led to the local and then federal authorities taking organised action. We highlighted this in our 2016 report on Germany, in the context of our visits to member states to examine NGO involvement in public decision-making.

**Are we not at a crossroads in our history? Where civil society (and, more particularly, religious and secular organisations with their capacity and practices in terms of receiving and integrating refugees and migrants) could make individual citizens more responsible again as regards their human duty (if they want to maintain access to their fundamental rights by preserving democracy and the rule of law) to welcome and integrate newcomers in their local communities? While also making sure that their states abide by their international undertakings in terms of fundamental rights for all?**

We are now celebrating the 10th anniversary of these Exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, which were initiated by our sadly departed humanist friend, Ambassador Guido Bellatti Ceccoli. At the end of 2018, we will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education [CM/Rec(2008)12, December 2008].

**On the occasion of its 10th anniversary, should we, the four pillars of the Council of Europe, not take an initiative to make the White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue: “Living Together as Equals in Dignity” adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 7 May 2008 more operational for stakeholders on the ground?**