



**Award Ceremony of the XXIV North-South**

**Prize of the Council of Europe**

**Remarks by Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni,**

**Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe**

**Strasbourg, 13 September 2019**

President of the Portuguese Republic,

President of the Assembly of the Portuguese Republic,

Head of the Portuguese Delegation to PACE,

Distinguished parliamentarians of the Portuguese Assembly of the Republic

Distinguished laureates of the North-South Prize,

Chair of the Executive Committee of the North-South Centre,

Executive Director of the North-South Centre,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

In a turbulent world, where the pace of change feels faster, and differences are often exploited for negative ends, intercultural dialogue is paramount.

It is the means by which we learn to celebrate diversity, bridge divisions, and unite around common aims.

And for the past 30 years the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe has facilitated that progress: fostering dialogue and promoting understanding between continents.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the Portuguese authorities for hosting the Centre and providing the support that amplifies its work - and we recognise that here today.

We also recognise the enormous achievements of the two winners of this year's North-South Prize.

On the face of it, they are very different.

Jaha Mapemzi Dukureh is a survivor of Female Genital Mutilation from The Gambia;

While Damien Careme is a French politician, the Mayor of Grande-Synthe until June of this year.

But these two extraordinary people have something in common:

A calling to leadership with a moral and humanitarian purpose.

Ms Dukureh, you not only found the courage to speak about your own experience of child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation;

You shared that story with the world, and played a leading role in the successful campaign for a government ban on FGM in Gambia –

And you continue to support vulnerable people in your current role as UN Women's first Regional Goodwill Ambassador for Africa.

Mr Careme, your belief in social equality and ecology has, among other things, opened up communal gardens to those who might otherwise have no access to green space, and put healthy, organic food on the plates of school pupils.

In addition, as the “mayor of migrants”, you have gone to great lengths to support migrants and refugees alike, leading the construction of a humanitarian camp, built to accommodate thousands of people, in compliance with United Nations norms, and without any financial support from the state.

Neither of our winners had to do what they did;

But both chose to take on the system: to drive change in the face of obstacles, and for the benefit of others.

So while the circumstances and subject areas of this year’s winners are very different, it is clear that they share tenacity, solidarity and compassion:

That these run from south to north, north to south, and that our world is better for it.

Ladies and gentlemen, the Council of Europe exists to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

And we work with national authorities in the areas of both our prize-winners:

Helping to prevent Female Genital Mutilation in our member states, not least through our Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence;

Promoting sustainability and biodiversity;

And ensuring that the human rights of migrants and refugees are respected within Europe’s borders.

But neither national governments, nor international organisations will achieve these important ends alone.

Whether north or south, Europe or Africa, a strong civil society and inspiring individuals are required to make progress and show humanity at its best.

Ms Dukureh and Mr Careme are two such people.

Welcome to the ranks of our North-South laureates; you richly deserve this prize.