

Press Release

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Volga Forum Declaration: in favour of regular dialogue between the Council of Europe and religious communities

Nizhniy Novgorod, 08.09.2006 - The international conference on intercultural and interfaith dialogue organised by the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe ended today with the adoption of the Volga Forum Declaration, in which the representatives of the Council of Europe and religious organisations from across Europe came out in favour of a regular dialogue on the issues of human rights, social cohesion and cultural diversity.

Over the two days' discussion, the conference participants stressed how important it was for representatives of religious communities to take an active part at international level, as they generally did at national level, in the debate on the topical issues with which Europe is confronted.

The declaration, which highlights the fundamental principles of freedom of religion, conscience and expression enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights, calls on the media to act responsibly by reflecting the diversity of society and encouraging greater mutual understanding and respect for human dignity.

The competent authorities of the 46 Council of Europe member states, including local and regional authorities, are also encouraged to take rapid action to adopt policies setting out effective tools and measures to foster the democratic management of cultural diversity. The Volga Region provides an example of dialogue and co-operation among various ethnic groups and religious communities.

The Council of Europe has made it a priority to promote intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in order to ensure not only a better understanding among cultures but also cohesion and stability in our societies, on the basis of the principle of accepting others, with their differences, and the principle of freedom of expression.

In 2007 the Council of Europe is to publish a White Paper on intercultural dialogue. Governmental and non-governmental organisations and religious organisations are invited to play an active part in its preparation.

The full text of the final declaration and more information on the conference are available at www.coe.int.

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 46 member states.