

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## **Resolution 202 (2005)<sup>1</sup> on intercultural and inter-faith dialogue: initiatives and responsibilities of local authorities**

The Congress, bearing in mind the proposal of the Chamber of Local Authorities,

1. Taking note of its Recommendation 170 (2005) on intercultural and inter-faith dialogue: initiatives and responsibilities of local authorities, which draws attention in particular to recent Council of Europe documents to be borne in mind in this context;
2. Drawing attention in particular to its Recommendation 153 (2004) and Resolution 181 (2004), on a pact for the integration and participation of people of immigrant origin in Europe's towns, cities and regions;
3. Concerned about the persistence of racist acts against people or property in many countries and the increasingly common use of racist and xenophobic arguments in some political discourse;
4. Worried about possible generalisation in the public's mind after the shock felt at terrorist acts by fanatics and extremists who distort beliefs or cultural or regional identities for their own purposes;
5. Convinced that intercultural and inter-faith tensions are a serious threat to peace, security, democracy and development;
6. Convinced that intercultural and inter-faith dialogue can help to prevent conflicts and bring about reconciliation by working towards improved social cohesion and solidarity within local communities;
7. Convinced that such dialogue presupposes a set of shared core values, namely:
  - a. recognition of the fundamental equality of all members of society (the principle of non-discrimination);
  - b. acceptance that each specific group has its valued place in society (the principle of inclusion);
  - c. recognition of the freedom of each individual to belong or not to a particular group (the principle of autonomy);
8. Convinced of the equal dignity of the various cultural and religious components of Europe, provided that they abide by the universal fundamental principles upheld by the Council of Europe: democracy, human rights, pluralism and the rule of law;
9. Convinced that the various cultural and religious groups which respect these fundamental values should have the same opportunities to participate in society and express their opinions, in compliance with the principles of democracy, so that no section of the community feels excluded by the dominant sections;
10. Noting that local authorities are increasingly confronted with real-life issues created by the growing cultural and religious diversity of the local community, whilst their competencies in this respect vary considerably from one member state to another;
11. Convinced that local authorities are in a prime position to promote intercultural and inter-faith dialogue because of their closeness to the community, enabling them to evaluate local cultural and religious diversity and engage in consultation and dialogue with local people in order to respond fairly to the concerns and demands of the various groups;
12. Invites, therefore, local authorities and local elected representatives in Europe to:
  - a. commit themselves publicly and determinedly to promoting intercultural and inter-faith dialogue and reflect that stance in all areas of local policy;
  - b. listen to all members of the community, not only nationals but also foreigners lawfully resident in the country and, as far as possible, refugees, asylum seekers and unlawful immigrants who are temporarily resident in the area;
  - c. gain an accurate picture of cultural and religious diversity in the locality in order to build dialogue and a relationship of trust with representatives of groups, inside as well as outside an institutional framework;
  - d. act as spokespersons for diversity in their communications with the local community as a whole, and with other levels of government if they themselves are not able to respond satisfactorily to the legitimate demands of particular cultural or religious groups;
  - e. promote amongst local residents a sense of belonging to a community that is enriched by its diversity, and within which everyone has rights and duties;
  - f. build on the cultural diversity of "old" and "new" minority groups and encourage their expression and development, together with mutually enriching interaction between the two;
  - g. highlight the historical, recent or contemporary contribution that the various cultures and religions have made to the locality, the urban environment and formation of a local identity;
  - h. combat social, economic or political exclusion and the unequal access to public services experienced by certain sections of the community, especially in disadvantaged urban areas;
  - i. fight all forms of discrimination and intolerance;

*j.* support community-wide access to creative works and cultural or sporting events which reflect the cultural diversity of the town or city, and promote coverage of this diversity in the local media;

*k.* take initiatives in support of educating the young, whether formally or informally, intolerance, diversity, understanding and dialogue, examples of such initiatives being cross-border co-operation, town twinning, and exchanges for young people and creative artists;

*l.* support voluntary-sector initiatives in the local community, and develop partnerships with associations that are representative of cultural and religious diversity and which engage in action conducive to intercultural and inter-faith diversity;

*m.* take account in the agenda of the municipality of the main cultural or religious events of the various sections of the community;

*n.* respond transparently and on the basis of objective criteria to the demands of the various cultural or religious groups, applying the principles of freedom of religion, religious neutrality, freedom of expression, legality, proportionality, transparency and non-discrimination as set out in the explanatory memorandum to this report (CPL (12) 4 part II);

*o.* develop and maintain equitable policies on establishing appropriate places of worship within the local community;

*p.* draw inspiration from the Congress handbook *Local consultative bodies for foreign residents* to provide a forum for dialogue and consultation with foreign residents who are lawfully resident in the municipality, as suggested in the Council of Europe Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level;

*q.* consider giving support to the establishment of a local inter-faith council similar to those already in place in some

European municipalities, examples of which are described in the explanatory memorandum to this resolution, so that representatives of the municipality's various cultural and religious groups can come together regularly;

*r.* ensure that the services offered by the city or town reflect diversity and that local-authority staff comply with these intercultural objectives and have the resources to make this policy choice a success;

13. Instructs its Culture and Education Committee to continue considering, identifying and disseminating good practice in the matter and in particular:

*a.* to hold as soon as possible a European meeting on dealing with cultural and religious diversity at local level;

*b.* to co-operate with the Directorate General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport (DGIV) in setting up a programme to award the title "Intercultural City of the Council of Europe" to a European city each year, on the basis of a pilot project launched in Sarajevo in 2003 to 2004;

*c.* to examine how to improve co-operation with the programme of the Local Democracy Agencies, which encourage intersectoral dialogue, tolerance, peaceful coexistence and the development or protection of local democracy in South-Eastern Europe;

*d.* in view of the announcement by the European Union declaring 2008 the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, actively co-operate with it, its Committee of the Regions and all relevant sectors of the Council of Europe.

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1. Discussed and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 31 May 2005 (see Document CPL (12) 4, draft resolution presented by M. Hunt (United Kingdom, L, ILDG) and B. Fäldt (Sweden, L, SOC), rapporteurs).

