



Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

Commission des Eglises auprès des Migrants en Europe

Kommission der Kirchen für Migranten in Europa

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European Conference against Racism and Intolerance 11-13 October 2000:

All Different - All Equal, From Principle to Practice

Statement by the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe

As Ecumenical Agency on Migration, Asylum and Anti-Racism in Europe in cooperation with the Conference of European Churches and the World Council of Churches, the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe welcomes this opportunity to address the issues of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at this European Conference. We particularly welcome the title of the Conference „All Different, All Equal - From Principles to Practice". The draft documents reflect a considerable effort to meet the challenging title of the Conference. We appreciate as well the participative role given to NGO's.

Sources, causes, forms and contemporary manifestations of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

No society today is completely free of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are at the root of many contemporary internal and international armed conflicts, and efforts to eliminate these sources of injustice are integral to the global Agenda for Peace and to the building of a universal culture of peace and non-violent approaches to conflict transformation.

Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance are barriers to development in poor countries and to equality of economic opportunity in rich ones. The negative impact of economic globalization, that tends to exclude large sectors from the benefits of the global economy, discriminates especially against former colonies of European powers in Africa, Asia, the

Caribbean and the Pacific, against Indigenous Peoples in Latin America, and against native and Aboriginal peoples in predominately White industrialized nations.

The dominant source of this social ill is White racism against people of colour around the world. The rising tide of violence in internal conflicts in many regions, however, demonstrates that extreme manifestations of national identity and of ethnocentrism are forms of related intolerance that have similar impact upon peoples of the same or similar racial heritage in many societies.

Religious intolerance and the political manipulation of religion and religious affiliation are on the rise in many parts of the world, and are increasingly a factor in national and international conflict. The efforts of the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance, who has drawn attention to these questions should be supported and strengthened. Governments should be further encouraged to respect the right to religious freedom, particularly to consider spiritualities of Indigenous Peoples as authentic religion, as per the recommendations of the UN Special Rapporteur on Religious Intolerance.

Racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance is often rooted in and used by nationalism and fundamentalism. Poverty, social exclusion, lack of education tend to strengthen racist and xenophobic attitudes in societies.

Women often suffer first and most severely the effects of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, including caste discrimination. Societies and social systems dominated by patriarchal attitudes and use of power often favor racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, making the oppression of women still more acute and complex.

The poor are the most vulnerable to the impact of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. With the feminization of poverty it is again women who are most severely affected and rendered vulnerable to other violations of human rights through sex tourism and trafficking of women, discriminatory population control policies and forced sterilization, inequitable access to education and discrimination in employment which relegates them to the most poorly paid and demeaning jobs.

Expressions of xenophobia - the rejection of strangers - are increasingly evident in all regions of the world, and it is widely visible in Europe.

Governments are devising more sophisticated ways of preventing would-be migrants and asylum-seekers from reaching their territories. There are increasing incidents of hostility and violence towards foreigners, whether legal migrants, undocumented workers, refugees, or asylum-seekers. Undocumented migrants, particularly women, are especially vulnerable as they are without any legal protection.

Europe's role in the global setting

This Conference is timely organized by the Council of Europe. It takes place 10 months before the World Conference against Racism will be held in South Africa. We would therefore hope that recognition of Europe's role in the global setting would be addressed. This includes an acknowledgement of the European historic responsibility for colonialism and slavery. The Political Declaration and the Conclusions drafted for this Conference contain some careful recognition of this, but apparently these formulations are subject to further discussion.

We are aware that this recognition is sometimes difficult. Churches in Europe with their Mission Societies have sometimes been part of colonial domination. However, the churches of various denominations have declared racism a sin in 1948, and many have repented for their wrong belief in superiority. The World Council of Churches already in 1968 started a Study and Action Programme to Combat Racism. At the same time, the Churches in Europe joined in the call for participation in development and have undertaken tremendous efforts in the fields of justice and fighting poverty since then.

We strongly recommend that colonialism and slavery be recognized as crimes against humanity and as root causes of today's unjust economic and political international power structures which also perpetuate racism. Such recognition of, as well as apology for the evils of the past may help to restore the dignity of the victims. We are aware of implications with regard to the demands for compensation. However, if the European states can again commit themselves to fulfill internationally agreed commitments (Rio 1992 and Copenhagen 1995) including increasing development aid, it will be far easier to find lasting solutions.

We welcome the efforts at this conference to stress the value and meaning of diversity. We agree that this is one of Europe's treasures. However, if this statement is to be put to practice, it requires welcoming differences and new instruments of mediation and education.

Measures of prevention, education and protection aimed at the eradication of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance at the national, regional and international levels.

As racism is not an opinion, but a crime, we recommend the dissemination of the ideology of racism be recognized as a crime. Victims of racism and related discrimination must have the right to get compensation from those who committed the crime.

The system of the „ombudsman" should be introduced on national, regional and local levels to support the victims of racism and discrimination. Transparent proceedings will help victims to have their rights respected as well as increase awareness among the public.

Government ministries of education, those responsible for education at all levels of society, including through private and/or religious schools should review curriculum content at all levels of schooling and education, and revise all those which either explicitly, or implicitly discriminate against social groups on the basis of race, ethnicity, nationality or caste. New, innovative educational materials should be researched and developed to promote race, ethnic and national tolerance and a culture of inclusiveness and non-discrimination. Such an approach to education should include civic education with respect to anti-racist laws and forms of legal redress available to the victims of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Programs promoting tolerance and multi-culturalism should be encouraged in the schools and through public awareness-raising campaigns.

Governments should develop awareness-raising programmes about the reasons for migration, the contributions which migrants make to their societies, and the need to appreciate the rich variety of cultures in the world.

For the integration of minorities and migrants, it is essential that their human rights are safeguarded and they be granted equal rights to citizens of the countries as soon as possible. Particularly for migrants and refugees, the right to live with their family is of tremendous importance.

We would like to address the issue of visa policies in this respect, too. More and more, migrants residing in European countries are not granted

permission to invite their relatives, let alone friends, for a visit, despite the fact that they have the means to support them and that they have a regular status. These persons, who pay taxes and are contributing to the economic life, are thus deprived of social life.

The various statuses accorded to migrant workers and refugees of different protection needs are also contributing to a divisive attitude. Some are granted rights, others not, often at the discretion of immigration authorities. This system enforces discriminatory procedures, even if the officials are not of the intention. The underlying concept is to control and minimize the rights of third country nationals. Often, third country nationals are treated disgraceful. We would therefore insist on extending more equal rights to third country nationals of various statuses. However, this will require addressing the issue of discrimination on the grounds of nationality. A tool will also be, practiced in some European states already, to make access to nationality easier as well as less costly. While in the past, the concept of one nationality prevented the acquisition of dual citizenship, it is more and more recognized that this is not a major problem in a time of high mobility and flexibility.

Employment, education and training

Qualified migrants and members of ethnic minorities have to work much more often in unqualified and low paid jobs than members of the majority. Therefore we recommend that school exams and professional education taken in other countries be accepted in the member states of the Council of Europe. If necessary, additional training should be made available to achieve adequate levels in the same profession in the member states.

Often refugees and migrants cannot prove their qualification, either because they were not able to bring these documents, or such papers are not normally provided in some countries. To enable access of migrants and refugees to qualified jobs, exams to prove their qualification should be considered, when no adequate papers can prove the qualification.

We regard the new directive of the European Union on establishing the principle of equal treatment irrespective of racial or ethnic origin as an extremely important step in this respect.

The introduction of a quota system or affirmative action should be taken into consideration: Migrants and members of ethnic minorities must have access to any profession. This is especially important for all the different levels of the

hierarchy in the authorities. Such measures support the process of integration and change the image of migrants and ethnic minorities in the public. While we are aware that the quota system also has disadvantages, it has proven to be effective to decrease gender discrimination. Such systems face a lot of opposition initially, but we are convinced that even the debate around it, can already help to raise awareness.

To create understanding and sensitivity, it is especially important that members of ethnic minorities and migrants also work in the different levels of the hierarchy of those institutions that have the task to combat racism and discrimination such as the justice sector and the police.

To be able to participate in society and to fight discrimination, it is of tremendous importance that groups of migrants and ethnic minorities have possibilities of organizing themselves. As they often belong to underprivileged groups, it is essential that governments and authorities support their organizations as well as other NGO's working directly or indirectly against racism and discrimination. Their work must be supported in many ways, very important among these through funding. The experts of these groups are important resource persons whose knowledge can be used to plan antiracist services and programmes. These resource persons can be helpful to train the authorities.

The European policies, action plans, programmes, funds against racism and discrimination should be complimented by corresponding policies, action plans, programmes and funds on national levels to allow sustainability of services.

The Contribution of Christian Churches

Churches in many European countries have been active combating racism at various levels. Through e.g. Racial Justice Sundays, they have given visibility to the ethnic minorities; they are involved in anti-racism training and mediation efforts. Churches have initiated training programmes on inter-cultural learning, e.g. with immigration or aliens authorities. Churches are committed to inter-religious dialogue with other faiths to contribute to respect and mutual understanding. Of particular importance is the churches' solidarity with migrant minority churches. CCME is encouraging this work through its working group on anti-racism.

Churches in Europe highly appreciate the work which is already done by the European bodies to combat racism, namely the European Commission

against Racism and Intolerance ECRI and the European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia. They need continued and structural support in order to be able to fulfill their role in an effective way. We do hope that this Conference as well as the World Conference against Racism next year will lead to a deepened and sustained commitment to eradicate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.