

**2012 European Council of Religious Leaders  
Sarajevo Declaration  
Ten years of living together in diversity and harmony**

2012 marks the achievement of the tenth anniversary of the European Council of Religious Leaders since our founding in 2002. In our inaugural statement, we said: “We are members of religious communities with profound visions of the dignity of the human person... as European religious leaders, we are committed to working together to end conflicts, to re-affirm religious condemnations of terror, and to promote justice and peaceful coexistence among the diversity of peoples, religions and traditions in Europe”. The decade since 2002 has seen many world-changing events to which the ECRL has been able to respond constructively through our practical work for reconciliation and peacemaking. For example we have supported and encouraged the creation of inter religious councils in areas of tension; we have shared in the struggle against cluster munitions and small arms; and we have enabled religious leaders publicly to speak against the stigmatisation of people living with HIV/Aids.

In addition in our annual Council meetings we have discussed issues of the greatest importance to human wellbeing in our society; we have called upon our fellow citizens to join us in working to pursue the ways of peace, tolerance and human dignity.

We have offered four declarations which contain substantial aspirations and detailed commitments. In this tenth anniversary meeting here in Sarajevo, we recommit ourselves to the content of those declarations, believing them to be significant contributions by people and communities of faith to the common good. We welcome the contributions of many other organisations which tend to the same vision of a Europe at peace with itself and contributing to the wellbeing of the world.

Our previous declarations have been these:

The 2008 Berlin declaration on inter religious dialogue offered an account of the ways in which inter religious dialogue contributes to mutual understanding between religious communities and benefits society as a whole.

The 2009 Lille declaration on a culture of peace, set out the spiritual, ethical, social and cultural contributions that our religious traditions bring to the creation of a culture of peace. We committed ourselves in ten ways to further that culture together.

The 2010 Istanbul declaration on tolerance noted its religious roots and that tolerance is a precondition for a culture of peace. We committed ourselves to work individually and together to translate an attitude of tolerance into transformative acts of toleration.

The 2011 Moscow declaration concerning advancing human dignity through human rights and traditional values, set out our understanding of the dignity of the human person and the rights and responsibilities which flow from it. We pledged ourselves to six ways in which our convictions should translate into action.

This year we meet in Sarajevo, where we have learned what is possible for harm and for good in the task of building a society in which all may flourish together in difference and in commonality.

In our discussions we have given emphasis to our understanding of citizenship and have sought to draw together the themes of previous declarations into an overarching consideration of the society in which we put our hopes for the future. We have termed this ‘the wholesome society’ with its connotations of health, organic wholeness and vitality. We see in the wholesome society the following components each contributing to the whole society and each dependent upon the other – this is what we believe living together could look like in practice.

**I. A diverse society which perceives itself as an interdependent whole composed of a variety of persons, cultures and faiths of essential value.**

Such a society does not consider itself to be composed of dominant and lesser cultures or faiths. It sees an organic whole in which each makes a contribution without which there would be disfigurement or impairment. The energies which flow between individuals, families and communities and which enable the whole to flourish are dialogue, mutuality and respect. All citizens make their contribution to the polity and citizenship is seen as the means through which both rights and responsibilities are exercised.

**II. A wise society which values the spiritual wellbeing of each human being.**

This is a society which is firmly rooted in the traditional values arising from belief in the inalienable dignity of human beings for which religious faith provides a firm underpinning. We appreciate and respect the insights and values which non religious traditions can bring and where these are coincident with our faiths; but we believe that our understandings of God and of the Divine bring a particular wisdom and maturity.

**III. A compassionate and caring society in which needs are provided for and solidarity is shown without discrimination based on differences of religion, gender, ethnicity or other such factors.**

Compassion and caring speak of a willingness to engage empathetically with the needs of others, particularly in times of suffering and stress and admits of no exceptions. A society in which compassion is normative is one which sees others first of all as human beings created by divine will and who share basic needs and longings.

**IV. A free society in which different perspectives are respectfully and vigorously debated.**

Such a society understands and values the importance of debate and dialogue based on mutual respect and within the frameworks provided by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Dialogue between religions is a crucial component of a free society and is based in the desire to understand and appreciate as much as it is on the desire to change minds. Dialogue between religious and non religious people is also of fundamental importance especially where there is growing ignorance of the basis of religious conviction and practice. In a free society religion has a natural place in the public sphere whether through its symbols or through its perspectives brought to bear on the issues of the day.

**V. A law abiding society in which all participate in and accept the democratic processes of government.**

This is a society which values the making and keeping of just laws by governments which represent the democratic will of the people and the norms of behaviour which are increasingly accepted internationally and which take their inspiration from the great religious traditions. In such a society, religious freedom is guaranteed, rights and responsibilities are respected, the weak are protected and the strong constrained from abusing their power. Religious communities which place the highest value on human dignity will have much to contribute to such a society and will wish to guard against their name being taken in vain to promote any particular ideology or claim.

**VI. A flourishing society in which the creativity of communities is encouraged to the benefit of all.**

Religious faith envisions a society in which each human being is able to reach the full potential with which they have been endowed. When individuals flourish, so does their society and the creative and imaginative gifts that different religions and cultures foster are made available to the whole of society to its benefit. Such a society is one in which the stresses of poverty and inequality are reduced and the culture of peace to which we are committed can be more readily promoted.

**VII. A stewarding society in which the divine gifts of creation are valued and safeguarded.**

A society which values and safeguards the created order and the relationship between human beings and the environment, will give more importance to stewardship than to consumption. It will be guided by principles of sustainability and renewal and will regard with great concern the destruction and degradation of environments and ecosystems around the world. The world's religions should have in common a vocation to conservation both because this is an integral element of their faiths and because it will tend to the relief of poverty and the promotion of justice.

**VIII. A self critical society in which religious and other groups are aware of the destructive risks of the abuse of power**

A healthy society will always be aware of the human tendency to pursue forms of power which distort and corrupt the good. Critical self scrutiny of motive and practice to counter those impulses which can even be found within religious traditions and which do not further the human dignity to which religions are committed, is an essential component of a wholesome society.

We commit ourselves in the coming decade to work out the practical implications of this vision of a wholesome society in close collaboration with religious and other institutions and civil society organisations at the local, national and European levels. We look forward with hope and realism to the coming decade in which we see the ECRL building further on the experience of living and working together to fulfil our true potential