

Statement on
Interreligious and intercultural dialogue from a woman's perspective

Different – Together – Strong was the theme of the 2023 ANDANTE Study Days, Oct. 25-29, 2023. The focus of the Study Days relates to the work of the *Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue, Conference of the international NGOs* (<https://www.coe.int/en/web/inqo>) of the Council of Europe in which ANDANTE is represented with voting rights. At the end of the Study Days the following resolution and decision were taken:

Resolution and Decision

The current global situation shows the urgency for dialogue for peace. As Catholic women we recognise the social doctrine of the Catholic Church which calls all women to dialogue with all members of the world's religions in the pursuit of world peace. We acknowledge that the absence of war does not mean peace and the lack of conflict does not mean community.

ANDANTE advocates the realisation of a permanent gender-balanced and inclusive platform for dialogue as requested by the 'Committee on Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue' as well as the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) of the Council of Europe in its recommendation REC-2080 (see Appendix 1). ANDANTE considers this to be an important and effective means to prevent prejudices and violence. It will also lead to resourceful ways of appreciating diversity in a peaceful and constructive way for the good of all. ANDANTE supports, puts into practice and actively advocates participatory processes within civil society.

ANDANTE decides to disseminate the findings of the Study Days and discuss them with a broad range of women in a webinar in Spring 2024 which will be held with Gabriela Frey, Co-President of the *Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue* at the Council of Europe.

Voices: Women from different countries of Europe and with different religious backgrounds shared their expertise and experiences in order to learn and understand the female view on the opportunities and challenges of interreligious and interconvictional dialogue. Below are a selection of voices:

- "The recognition of women's basic human rights should be at the heart of every religion. Dialogue between religions should lead to greater gender equality, empowerment and a more just and inclusive world."
- "Dialogues are fundamental for peace. In interreligious dialogues it is helpful to work with biographical approaches. Sharing episodes of one's life facilitates meaningful encounters and brings people closer together."
- "Women are always involved in dialogues of the life-cycle: be it as midwives or care givers."
- "Many religions profess a divine creator of all reality. In the biblical scriptures, women are also held in high esteem. Without woman, there is no man."
- "We see change in our Catholic church and will continuously speak up for women's spirituality and vocations in order to allow women to reach their full potential as God sees men and women equal in baptism."

Call for action - ANDANTE encourages its Member Organisations:

1. to engage in interreligious and intercultural dialogue, respecting different realities of women's lives, in order to promote peace: this is the KAIROS now!,
2. to organise a women of faith coalition thus uniting the various skills, wisdom, charisma, experiences and different points of view in order to have a greater impact on making peace possible - the whole is greater than its parts! It is also time to find new ways and solutions to act more effectively,
3. to mobilise and establish connections between grass roots movements and decision making bodies in church and society in order to advance an inclusive, gender-balanced and more effective dialogue: be it in a framework of hierarchy (vertically) or within different groups (horizontally). One of many examples is the World Day of Prayer (<https://worlddayofprayer.net>).

Appendix 1

ANDANTE holds participatory status at the Council of Europe and, because of that, is a member with voting right of the Conference of the International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGO) at the Council of Europe. It participates in the work of the Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue (CIRICD). This Committee has been living a well-networked 'form of a dialogue platform' for many years with currently over 15 'Faith based INGOs' and has many partner faith organisations who are open for interreligious and interconvictional dialogue.

One of the current main goals of the CIRICD is to set up a 'Permanent Platform for Interreligious Dialogue' in the Council of Europe. This was already requested by the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) in 2015 in the recommendation REC-2080. The implementation has failed so far because, within the Committee of Ministers (CM), some countries were vetoing it. Currently no serious work on interreligious/interconvictional dialogue is visible in the PACE nor in the Council of Europe. There is also a concern that more radical forces might take control of this issue.

We support the REC-2080 and the excellent work of Anne Brasseur and other members of the PACE who are actively committed to introducing a truly integrative dialogue platform in the Council of Europe. It has become clear from many years of grass root experience and work by the Conference of INGOs, that it can only be helpful to include civil society in a meaningful dialogue. Concentrating only on high-level meetings of decision makers - as usually done - is simply not enough to effectively address today's challenges (see Middle East conflict, growing hatred, extremism, etc.).

We welcome the good work of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, <https://www.congress-intercultural.eu/en/> and of the Intercultural Cities, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/interculturalcities> and others. But we also favour a focused dialogue on the challenging issues of the Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue in the Council of Europe.

We advocate

We join our voices in urging the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to finally install a genuine interreligious and interconvictional platform for dialogue at the Council of Europe that is gender-balanced and proactively includes the civil society with its broad and diverse know how and experience. A platform like this supports and strengthens an attitude of dialogue and helps to build up dialogue work in civil society and organisations like ANDANTE.

How can ANDANTE and its member organisations support the Permanent Platform for Dialogue?

1. Contribute information of their best dialogue practices to the Committee for Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue in order to prepare a database and/or toolkit to be shared as inspiration for other organisations hence also showing the value of civil society's contribution,
2. Find out representatives in the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) and in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities who are open to the topic or have already worked on it and would be willing to support our "lobbying" and think up a dialogue platform and then implement it,
3. Pass on their contacts to the representative of ANDANTE at the Council of Europe (Sybille Bader) and to speak about the necessity to these representatives about the urgent need to implement such a Dialogue Platform.

Augsburg, October 29, 2023

