



# CEIF

Central European Interfaith Forum

## NITRA STATEMENT

More than 150 participants representing 20 nations, 3 continents, 7 world religions as well as other religious, spiritual or humanist traditions, met in Nitra, Slovakia, on 25 July 2016, to jointly address some of humanity's most vexing problems. The Central European Interfaith Forum (CEIF 2016) convened in Slovakia's ancient cultural and spiritual centre for fascinating interfaith and civic exchanges in the search for solutions to the growing ethnic, cultural and religious tension in Europe. The alarming trends of nationalism, extremism and xenophobia in our societies, as well as the world's complex economic, social and political issues, require dialogue between the spiritual individuals, communities, authorities, and the guiding institutions of this world. This is the kind of dialogue, followed by practical action, that the Central European Interfaith Forum aims to inspire. Accompanied by a policy session on poverty, a lively NGO Forum and a sweeping photo exhibition titled "I Saw All Churches of Slovakia", the Forum culminated with an Interfaith Meeting in Prayer and Thought.

### 3 TAKEAWAYS

- \* In these darkening times, dialogue is essential. True dialogue, however, must be conducted out of respect for the other. True dialogue must also be underpinned by knowledge.
- \* "Live and let live" is no longer sufficient in a Europe overwhelmed by migration and other challenges. Solidarity in action must be based on the principle "live and help live".
- \* Since religions are often perceived as a source of conflict, believers of all religious traditions should play active roles in public life and boldly present the undistorted reality of life as a believer and of religion's power as a force for good.

### 10 IDEAS

#### A Post-Secular Society?

1. People in the modern age have often lost a sense of the religious dimension of life. The secular environment, which has reinforced the underlying materialistic and darwinistic trends in our societies, causes frustrations with negative consequences. Secularism, which was supposed to replace religion, has failed to fulfill its premises, especially its claims to be non-ideological. Our experience testifies to this failure. In recent history of Central and Eastern Europe, religion was replaced with a rigid state ideology and totalitarian systems. Religious establishments have been too slow to adapt to the tide of secularism, often preferring a "dwelling" rather than a "seeking" approach and losing touch with people as a result.
2. Nevertheless, diverse forms of secularism are a vital part of the European tradition and secular thinkers should be invited to participate in interfaith dialogue. Only a healthy secular environment provides freedom and security for the exercise of faith by all believers. For their part, believers need an open, dialogical approach to the world and religious and spiritual traditions should hold a permanent dialogue with science: such an approach can help to moderate extremism and bring beneficial ideas to young people yearning for sense, direction, and role models in their lives. Indeed, interfaith could reach the new generation, unfazed by traditional churchgoing, as well as the post-Communist world, with new forms of spiritual meditation, song, prayer, and active community life.

#### Migrants: Fear and/or Compassion?

3. Compassion has been replaced by fear in many European countries. Economic, cultural, and security issues are indivisible from the whole problem of migration. Unfortunately European governments are not pro-active, which is the reason why Europeans often become radicalised. Today's political attitudes on migration are shaped by legalism and opportunism: we need both a rational and a compassionate approach instead.



4. The essential message of the majority of religious holy scriptures is all-encompassing love. All Abrahamic religions, and many others too, tell stories of refugees which can be applied to the current migration crisis: we are communities of pilgrims, and this shared idea should energise us to help those in need regardless of their confession.

#### Inner Roots of Poverty

5. Limited access to food, housing, justice and education are the key indicators of poverty, but poverty has many dimensions. Poverty is a moral problem perceived as such by all religions. Many Europeans have difficulty sympathising with refugees because they suffer their own “working poverty”: they remain poor even though they work. Thus it is no less acute to pay the same attention to poor people living in our own countries and enter the battle to improve the quality of their lives.
6. Growth, sustainability, and wisdom are necessary prerequisites for a successful solution to the problem of poverty. While combating poverty at the national level can have positive effects when policymakers work efficiently, the effort often becomes wasted in nations with high rates of corruption or rigid bureaucracies. In such situations, the engagement of individuals and local communities in helping the poor becomes irreplaceable, and undoubtedly, profoundly human.

#### Ringling Out for Peace and Friendship

7. All believers can understand the basic truth: we are all children of one God. All religions share common values such as love, good, and kindness. These values must be front and centre in our educational systems. It is vital to promote discussion on various topics in local languages as well as the learning of foreign languages in order to better understand our neighbours: an experience that could be taught both at school and in the family. Intercultural and interfaith dialogue must find its way into the curricula: bringing up a selfless, values-driven young generation rather than one centered on egoism and short-term gain is vital for the survival of our world.
8. Religions are often perceived as a source of conflict. Therefore, believers of all religious traditions should adopt active roles in public life and boldly present the undistorted reality of life as a believer. For their part, policymakers should not underestimate the religious dimension of human beings.

#### Dialogue! What? Why? How?

9. Neither the media nor social networks usually provide an accurate image of the life of our religious communities, since they predominantly report on scandal and violence, committed either by extremist organisations abusing religious ideas or by ill-intentioned individuals. Nevertheless, spiritual and community leaders must tirelessly work online and with journalists to correct the balance between good and bad news. This in turn can lead to the calming of Islamophobia and Antisemitism and to a better appreciation of these and all other faiths in Europe’s pluralistic societies grounded in Christianity.
10. We feel that bringing people of different backgrounds together is an urgent need in these turbulent times. There is nothing that can replace human, personal contact. Interfaith dialogue, driven by respect for the other traditions but also by confident proclamation of one’s own faith, is a necessary precondition to peace, and an imperative for all people of faith. Dialogue with the dynamic religion of Islam in particular, by engaging and empowering the moderate Imams in the West, might actually become the necessary impetus for the renewal of Christianity and the flourishing of other religions in Europe. A regular forum for meetings between people of different faith traditions should be established in Central Europe, a place receptive to both the Western rational and the Eastern holistic way of thinking. Such a forum would be well positioned to promote both dialogue and action, thus helping to create an atmosphere of confidence, trust and security for those seeking to better align things on Earth with those in Heaven, here and now.

Point of Contact: **Mr Mário Nicolini**, Executive Director, Forum of the World’s Religions – Slovakia  
+421.948.780.830, [mario@fwr.sk](mailto:mario@fwr.sk), <http://fwr.sk/ceif-2016/>

*This statement was compiled by the Forum of the World’s Religions - Slovakia. While it is largely based on discussions at CEIF 2016, it may not fully represent the opinions of all participants.*