

European Council of Religious Leaders



Believing and Belonging, in Humility:

A Religious Response to the Challenges Faced in European Communities Today

ECRL Statement, Oslo 2024

On the 16th - 18th of September 2024, on the spectacular banks of the *Oslofjorden*, we, the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) assembled with thanks to our generous hosts, the Church of Norway, the Muslim Dialogue Network, and the Council of Religious and Life Stances Communities. Special gratitude must also be offered to the Mayor of Oslo, Anne Lindboe, who took time to personally welcome the ECRL to the city of Oslo with a reception in the City Hall.

It was fitting that this year the Council assembled in Oslo, a diverse and thriving city and the spiritual home of ECRL; where the Council was founded in 2002. Oslo is also the home of the Nobel Peace Prize, a much-needed symbol of hope in an increasingly violent and divided world.

The ECRL convened to discuss the complex and volatile environment in many European countries today. The challenges of political extremism, the illegal invasion of Ukraine, the climate crisis, migration, increasing social and economic inequalities, violent religious radicalisation, and the advance of aggressive and exclusive sectarian discourses, means that religious leaders and communities are faced with challenges unprecedented in the modern era.

The Council's deliberations can be characterised by the members' continuing commitment to *Belief, Belonging, and Humility*.

The Council reaffirmed that religious belief is the core foundation of ECRL's membership and work. Belief in the power of religious practice and tradition, and the sanctity of all creation, underpins the Council's existence, our relationships with each other and our communities, and our actions.

The Council noted that whilst religious 'actors' increasingly become another 'stakeholder' in political and public consultations and dialogues, and efforts to engage with and influence policy and practice can seem crucial to faith-based organisations, the Council urges leaders of all religious convictions to remember what makes us distinctive.

We, the European Council of Religious Leaders, encourage people of all religions to engage with political leaders and institutions on our own terms for the common good, reminding them of the enduring and unique insights ingrained within religious teachings, ethics, practice, language, and belief.

Though it is understandable that today many people in Europe feel powerless and disconnected in the face of numerous complex challenges, it is vital to remind politicians and leaders that for many people across the world religion remains a source of hope, and a community in which they can belong.

Whilst in many countries across Europe religion is increasingly excluded from the public sphere, in Norway public discourse and policies have attempted to embrace all religious communities, encouraging community cohesion, inclusive citizenship, and democratic participation.

Governments across Europe can learn from the Norwegian example. Religious exclusion perpetuates feelings of marginalisation and alienation, creating the breeding ground for disenfranchisement and violent radicalisation. Alternatively, a sense of acceptance and belonging in society enhances social cohesion, and inclusive and democratic citizenship.

We, the European Council of Religious Leaders call on national governments and European regional bodies to design and develop political systems and mechanisms which respectfully and meaningfully engage all religious communities, making all citizens feel valued and accepted members of society.

The European Council of Religious Leaders is a forum where members come together as equals, to respectfully discuss the most pressing challenges faced by people of all religions and none in Europe today. This often includes difficult conversations about religious and political differences; and this can only be done because we approach our work with a profound sense of humility and utmost respect for each other.

The ECRL also acknowledges that religion is not exempt from criticism, and we need to be self-reflective and self-critical to understand what contributions we have also made to increasing instability in our European communities and societies. At every meeting we ask ourselves, how we can be better public servants, and help encourage more ethically responsible attitudes and behaviour, in ourselves, and our communities.

The ERCL also recognises that moral and ethical ideals and action are not exclusive to religion, and the Council remains open to dialogue, cooperation, and learning, with all partners who share our ethos and goals for peace.

We, the European Council of Religious Leaders urge religious leaders everywhere to lead by example – modelling impeccable moral and ethical standards, practicing our religions with devotion and humility, and speaking out publicly to challenge injustice, violence, and oppression wherever it occurs.

Given the current challenges in Europe and wider world today, the need for building respectful relations between religious communities through dialogue is more necessary than ever. The ECRL is a non-governmental, non-partisan organisation, committed to multi-religious action for positive change.

The ECRL comes together because we *believe* in the power of divine creation and sanctity of life, and in working tirelessly for just and sustainable peace throughout the world.

The ECRL cherishes the deep respect and cooperation we have developed between our members and are thankful we *belong* to a community and Council dedicated to peace.

The ECRL will continue to work together with *humility* to address the complex challenges we face in Europe today, in the hope of improving the lives of people everywhere.

The European Council of Religious Leaders

18th September 2024, Oslo.