

**Interconference  
During the European Preparatory Conference  
"All Different, All Equal: From Principle to Practice"  
And the NGO Forum  
October 10-13 2000 Strasbourg (F)**

DEMOCRACY and TRANSPARENCY are increasingly difficult to achieve in a world of more and more complex decision-making, growing inequalities in access to information, and difficulties in communication between ethnic and cultural groups.

MODERN TECHNOLOGY, e.g. the Internet, can be used for the purpose of making political processes more democratic and transparent. Unfortunately, it has become an important tool for spreading racist and fascist ideas. It makes it even more necessary for human rights activists to pay particular attention to the availability of the new means of communication.

[I CARE](#) is a unique pioneering project aiming to promote democracy and transparency in international anti-racist activities through the use of modern technology.

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**1. WHAT IS I CARE?**

The Internet Centre Anti-Racism Europe is the most comprehensive Internet project in the history of the European anti-racist movement. It gives an electronic voice to dozens of anti-racist initiatives and non-governmental organisations throughout the continent.

I CARE is a partnership between UNITED for Intercultural Action, the European network against nationalism, racism, fascism and in support of migrants and refugees, and the [Magenta Foundation](#), an anti-racist non-governmental organisation with years' long experience in the field of the Internet.

## 2. WHAT IS THE INTERCONFERENCE?

The InterConference is a tool to open an interactive channel between policy makers and people who deal with racism and discrimination on a daily basis.

The target of the InterConference was the European conference on racism, organised by the Council of Europe in Strasbourg under the title "All Different, All Equal: From Principle to Practice. European contribution to the UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance". The conference took place on 11-13 October 2000 and was preceded by an NGO Forum on 10-11 October 2000 with the title "End Racism Now!"

The UN World Conference on Racism, Racial discrimination, Xenophobia and related intolerant (WCAR) is to be held 31 August - 7 September 2001 in Durban, South Africa. A parallel NGO Forum will take place 28 August - 1 September 2001 also in Durban.

The InterConference consisted of two parts **Interconference warm-up** and **Interconference live**:

### 2.1. INTERCONFERENCE WARM-UP

Through the InterConference project I CARE assisted non-governmental organisations participating in the European Conference and in the NGO Forum, providing them with a means of communication between each other through e-mail discussion lists and giving them the possibility of publishing their position papers on the I CARE website.

Country pages were created for every member state of the Council of Europe. They included NGO policy papers as well as reports of national NGO meetings that had been organised to prepare for the European/World Conference so everybody could gain knowledge on what was happening everywhere regarding the preparations.

The I CARE website listed all organisations officially invited to take part in the Conference.

More importantly, I CARE helped those who were unable to participate directly to influence the discussions both before and during the European conference. This was especially important for the NGOs from Central and Eastern Europe who might have wanted to participate, if they would not have had to pay their travel and accommodation themselves. Arguably, thanks to I CARE the process leading to this big international conference has become more transparent and democratic than ever.

### **2.1.1 E-mail discussion lists**

From January till October 2000 I CARE ran e-mail discussion lists to instigate discussion and gather recommendations from the field concerning the main topics of the Strasbourg conference.

Because of comments frequently expressed on the I CARE e-mail discussion list a significant change was introduced in the preparations for the European NGO Forum. The Forum was opened to all organisations willing to attend, not just those which had been officially invited.

The discussion list has been used to inform non-governmental organisations about the forthcoming UN World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and enabled them to exchange views and opinions on their participation in it.

Other topics passionately debated on the discussionlist included, a.o.:

- o strong criticisms from Polish and British NGOs regarding their respective governments' handling of the preparatory process and not taking into consideration legitimate NGO concerns;
- o islamophobia, as well as the specific nature of anti-Semitism and anti-Black racism;
- o the gender and age dimension of racism
- o calls for compensations for slavery and colonialism;
- o the ethnic composition of anti-racist organisations.

A summary of debates on the discussion list was prepared and distributed to participants of the NGO Forum as well as of the intergovernmental conference in Strasbourg in October 2000. (see the I CARE document Comments from Cyberspace)

### **2.1.2 Expectations and Results**

In the weeks immediately preceding the conference I CARE initiated an additional discussion about expectations regarding the outcome of the event. Comments came, among others, from Sweden, Norway, the Netherlands, UK, Canada, Russia, Macedonia, Armenia, and the Czech Republic. Many of the comments can be seen to have been reflected in one way or another in the final results of the European Conference or the NGO Forum.

***@ It is a pity that small NGOs have no money to come here and only big NGOs are represented in this Forum.***

This concern was at least partly addressed by the I CARE activity during the conference itself. All NGOs not represented directly had a chance to follow and monitor the proceedings and to express their viewpoints through the Internet.

***@ How to move from policies and declarations to practice and implementation of law?***

All different, All Equal: FROM PRINCIPLE TO PRACTICE" was adopted as the official title of the European Conference. According to the official introductory

text "European preparations are envisaged to provide an input to the World Conference which should be forward-looking, practical and action-oriented".

**@ Concrete strategies how NGOs can contribute to "democratisation" of policies [should be discussed].**

"The European Conference welcomes the catalytic role that non-governmental organisations have played in promoting human rights education and raising awareness about racism. It recognises the precarious situation of human rights and anti-racist NGOs in many countries and urges States to lift unnecessary barriers to the functioning of civil society. It calls upon participating States to strengthen co-operation with non-governmental organisations, harnessing their experience and expertise in developing governmental legislation, policies and other initiatives. It also calls upon participating States to provide financial support to human rights education and awareness raising activities of non-governmental organisations, without compromising their independence."  
*(from the General Conclusions of the European Conference)*

**@ Focus should be placed mainly on institutional, structural, and other hidden or unintentional forms of racism, paternalism and detrimental forms of social control that are being fostered by "neutral" or quasi-liberal policies.**

"The European Conference furthermore recognises the persistence for targeted persons of the following problems in particular:  
o the 'everyday' discrimination that exists in employment, housing, education, services and so on; (...)  
o in some cases, the existence of certain forms of racism and prejudice in State institutions, direct and indirect."  
*(from the General Conclusions of the European Conference)*

**@ We ask for concrete reparations, it is urgent and we hope [it is going to be] the head line of this conference.**

"To reinforce protection against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, the European Conference calls upon participating States to ensure that all persons have access to effective and adequate remedies and enjoy the right to seek from competent tribunals just and adequate reparation or satisfaction for any damage suffered as a result of such discrimination." *(from the General Conclusions of the European Conference)*

**@ The UN seems toothless in its ability to check member states' anti-immigrant platform and refugee detentions (...), al-though they have signed various instruments to that effect. (...) I would like to see some accountability demanded of UN members. I am not sure I can expect results though.**

The topic of migration and asylum policies was initially absent from the schedule of conference discussions. Under pressure from anti-racist groups, expressed inter alia through I CARE, it was introduced as an additional, fifth working group topic of the NGO Forum. As a result of NGOs' influence during the intergovernmental conference it was stressed that the aspect of immigration and asylum must be taken into account in all working group discussions. A call for the recognition of economic and social rights for asylum seekers, migrants and

refugees had been initially absent from the first draft of the General Conclusions and it was introduced during the Conference.

"26. The European Conference calls upon participating States to promote the positive aspects of immigration among the general public, including by stressing the value of diversity and the contribution made by migrants to society. It underlines that promoting the social inclusion of migrants is a key instrument in combating racism, xenophobia and related intolerance. The European Conference notes that undue stress on restrictive admission/immigration policies may produce negative stereotyping and thus adversely affect persons belonging to targeted groups and the integration of non-nationals. It furthermore recognises the effect arbitrary detention of asylum-seekers and undocumented persons has on the growth of a climate of xenophobia. The European Conference calls for all measures relating to asylum seekers and refugees to be fully in accordance with the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees.

27. The European Conference underlines that family reunification has a positive effect on integration and calls upon participating States to facilitate family reunion, with due regard to the need for an independent status on the part of family members. The European Conference urges all participating States to grant to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants access to basic economic and social rights." *(from the General Conclusions of the European Conference)*

***@ I would hope that in working together we will not try to hierarchize pain and suffering and claiming primacy but see that our realities intersect in all kinds of compounded and related ways. I hope we will see ourselves as fighting the same struggle in different forms using different means but for the same ends.***

"The European Conference believes that all States must acknowledge the suffering caused by slavery and colonialism. It further believes all states must reject ethnic cleansing and genocide, in Europe and in other regions of the world, and work together to prevent their recurrence. The European Conference also believes that the Holocaust must never be forgotten." *(from the General Conclusions of the European Conference)*

## **2.2. INTERCONFERENCE LIVE**

### **2.2.1 Overview**

- o Diary of several delegates at the conference on [www.icare.to](http://www.icare.to);
- o Digest: email newsletter with highlights of the day;
- o Views from 'home', broadcast on a big screen in the conference building;
- o Reports, activities and policy papers of the NGOs in the different countries at the conference published on [www.icare.to](http://www.icare.to);
- o Web newspaper updated twice daily with reports of the Conference and the NGO Forum
- o Video interviews with governmental and non-governmental participants

## Chat sessions programme

### ***Tuesday 10 October***

Introduction to the events / Racism in Eastern Europe / invitees: Rafal Pankowski (Never Again, PL), Boris Putsintsev (Citizen's Watch, RUS)  
Migration and asylum policies in Europe / invitees: Patrick Yu (NICEM, GB-NI), Ashok Kumar (Voice for Asylum, DK)

### ***Wednesday 11 October***

Education / invitees: European Youth Centre  
Media / invitees: European Roma Rights Centre

### ***Thursday 12 October***

Legal aspects / invitees: Winnie Sorgdrager (ECRI representative NL), Ralph du Long (Duo A, NL)  
Policies and practices / invitees: Roger van Boxtel (Minister of Integration Affairs, NL) and Hedy Fry (Secretary of State Multiculturalism and Women's Affairs, CND), Nuria Vives Ferrer (SOS Racismo, E)

### ***Friday 13 October***

What's next? The UN World Conference / invitees: Laurie Wiseberg (UN NGO Liaison for the World Conference)

I CARE set up a temporary Internet centre and reported live to the outside world from the above mentioned Conference, giving a chance to NGOs not present in Strasbourg to voice their concerns and to discuss with government officials and other NGOs through daily chat sessions.

The week of the NGO Forum and the European Conference against Racism was the climax of I CARE 's work serving European non-governmental organisations. An international team of technicians, chat-session moderators, translators and reporters was selected from representatives of various anti-racist organisations, from both Eastern and Western Europe. Team members came from Belgium, the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Holland, Poland, Romania and Russia.

The InterConference bilingual newspaper - "The Newspaper/Le Journal" was well read, the I CARE site was visited more than 4000 times during the Conference by visitors from 97 countries. Apart from the web edition, a daily e-mail version went out to 2097 addresses and 500 copies of a paper version of this newspaper were distributed daily amongst the participants of the Conference.

A beamer and a large screen were used to project the I CARE website, the chat sessions, the InterConference Newspaper and the Video Interviews in the conference lobby.

Throughout the week I CARE reporters conducted interviews with participants of the conference which were published (written as well as on video) on the

InterConference website. They reported regularly from all plenary sessions and working groups, thus giving a chance to follow other discussions to all those interested, both inside and outside of the conference. Several delegates wrote special daily diaries for the I CARE Internet newspaper sharing their personal perspectives on the proceedings.

### 2.2.2 Chat sessions

The I CARE chat sessions with special guests were well visited. An average of 30 people visited per chat session, of which 20 actively participated in the discussions. As there were seven chat sessions, this brings the total amount of chat visitor to ca 200. The quality of the discussions was high. People from the following countries participated: Albania, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Spain, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. Highlights of the chat sessions were the debates with Mr. Roger van Boxtel, Minister of Urban Policy and Integration of Ethnic Minorities in the Netherlands and Dr. Hedy Frey, Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Status of Women in Canada as well as the chat with Ms. Winnie Sorgdrager, Dutch Representative in ECRI (European Commission against Racism and Intolerance).

The topics of the chat sessions broadly corresponded with those discussed on the spot in Strasbourg. The following excerpt of a chat session log book (on legal protection against racial discrimination) gives an example of how the discussions went:

*"beamer1": Pipro do you not agree with me that since discrimination is a problem that costs society a lot of money and does a lot of damage, it would be logical that the state(s) pays lawyers to help victims?*  
*"rajendra": it seems like the 'richer' the 'country' becomes the less money there is for those who do not follow the path of wealth and those people get less and less opportunities and chances. "piproo": Ariel : I do agree, sure.*  
*"winnie": pipro: may be. But also young advocates have to learn and they are often really good (...)*  
*"Mellouki": Ariel\ : Discrimination is also an attack on quality of life of everyone. If your black neighbour is discriminated against, then you are (as white :-) also concerned by degradation of the social climate after all.*  
*"winnie": Ariel: every EC member has to bring the law in accordance with article 13 [of the Amsterdam Treaty] and new members also*  
*"\_ruben": ralp: so the most effective way to ensure this might be to require lawmakers to introduce provisions for a way to prosecute for making "unjust" division, instead of making laws for specific cases of race-, age-, gender etc. discrimination?*  
*"ralp": pipro: the amount of money paid to a lawyer doesn't necessarily indicate the quality of the services*

The full log of all sessions is available from [www.icare.to/InterConference/chatlog.html](http://www.icare.to/InterConference/chatlog.html)

### 2.2.3 Outside input

During the NGO Forum and the European Conference the outside world contacted the participants, too, through Internet messages displayed in the conference hall. Some of them had an impact on the discussions:

***@ Dear friends, We are still knocked down by the electoral success of the Flemish racist party Vlaams Blok (Flemish Block) last week-end. 33% of the votes in the city of Antwerp, almost 20% in the city of Ghent and a break-thru in whole Flanders... We still fight racism! But what makes me worry most is the complete silence in the rest of Europe. Do we really have to wait till they take power as in Austria before Europe and European NGO's take action? The problem is that big that we can't handle it anymore locally... (Antifanet, Belgium)***

"(...)we are appalled by the recent electoral success in Europe of political parties disseminating and promoting racist and xenophobic ideology. " (from the Report from the Forum of Non-Governmental Organizations

The question of electoral and parliamentary advances of the extreme right in Europe was additionally highlighted by an incident involving the participation of the Austrian governmental representation in the conference. Austrian anti-racist NGOs strongly protested against the hypocrisy of the planned opening speech by the Austrian Minister of Foreign Affairs, who is a member of the coalition government with the racist "Freedom" Party. Fearing a negative reception, the Austrian minister cancelled her participation. Nevertheless, the Austrian representatives of anti-racist organizations, supported by other NGOs, expressed their resistance to the participation of the extreme-right in the Austrian government by holding up red cards with the slogan "No coalition with racism" during the speech of the (lower-rank) official Austrian delegate. The story was widely commented and reported on I CARE.

A group of East-Central European NGOs used I CARE to issue a statement calling for more attention to be paid to specific forms of racism in the former communist states.

***@ In the last decade, it has caused mass killings in many parts of former Yugoslavia, and numerous armed conflicts and substantial loss of life on the territories of former USSR. It has been steadily gaining ground in Russia in recent years. If neglected, this variety of racism may well lead to new ethnic conflicts in other parts of Europe.***

"We are (...) alarmed by the development and persistence of aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism which constitute re-emerging expressions of xenophobia, thriving in particular in many Eastern and Central European countries and countries of the former Soviet Union. These phenomena have lead over recent years to serious and large-scale violations of human rights, hatred, discrimination and persecution targeting specific groups such as peoples from the Caucasus region in Russia, and in some cases to 'ethnic cleansing' such as



that perpetrated in the former Yugoslavia. We warn governments that ignoring these phenomena may lead to further tragic developments."  
(from the Report from the Forum of Non-Governmental Organisations)

#### **2.2.4 Looking back**

Since the European Conference in Strasbourg the I CARE website has been a forum for further discussion on both positive and negative aspects of the European Conference and its output in the form of the official documents:

***@ The NGO Forum did a good job of recognising the urgency surrounding the plight of refugees and abuses against migrants resulting from a host of racist and xenophobic governmental policies and practices in Europe. (...) Future action on migrants rights and refugee protection issues must, first and foremost, be based on human rights principles. Governments have affirmative obligations under the 1951 Refugee Convention and under various international and regional treaties to promote and protect the rights of both groups. This places respect for refugees and migrants in a framework that recognises their basic human dignity and avoids the more popular but exploitative approach of arguing that governments should afford them protection because they need their labour in low-wage, low status jobs that most nationals would not accept.***

\*\*\*\*

***@ Coming back to the NGO Forum, I would like to express our gratitude for the organisers and our satisfaction for the openness of the debates. We really felt that we could clearly speak out our thoughts and that we were carefully listened to, not only heard. We managed to include important points into the NGO Forum's final report, such as***

- in the chapter "General remarks and recommendations", paragraph 5 it was added: "Roma, Gypsies and Travellers as whole, dispersed in a world-wide Diaspora, should receive particular attention at the international and the European levels as a transnational minority group";***
- in the chapter "Policies and practices to combat racism and related discrimination at national level", the paragraph 43, beginning with "Pay particular attention to and adopt immediate measures to eradicate the widespread discrimination and persecution targeting Roma, Gypsies, Travellers throughout much of Europe today", we had the chance to add: "including through the establishment of structures and processes in the partnership between public authorities and representatives of Roma, Gypsies and Travellers";***
- in the chapter "Education and awareness-raising to the national and international levels", paragraph 65, we added the call on the states to: "provide state support for education in the mother tongue".***

***@ I'm very pleased, as this year's anti-racism rapporteur for the European Parliament and a vice-chair of its cross-party anti-racism intergroup, to have taken part in the conference as a co-discussant in the education and awareness-raising workshop. In that capacity I was able successfully to***

*support, in the drafting group, some of the key NGO and workshop amendments to the general conclusions e.g. on language such as changing 'tolerance' to 'respect' and 'vulnerable groups' to 'targeted groups' in the text, in getting more references to the importance of fair and non-inflammatory policies on immigration and asylum, and in urging States to include women and youth representatives in their delegations to the world conference. I thought that there was in fact an excellent NGO input (and rather more ethnically representative than the political/official delegations!). (...) (Sarah Ludford MEP)*

### **3. WHAT NEXT?**

I CARE has enabled activists of NGOs Western, Central and Eastern Europe to meet in cyberspace to share their concerns with a view on the future so that the experience can be used in preparation for the NGO participation in the World Conference against Racism.

The debates on the future involvement of NGOs in the World Conference and the preparatory process are continuing both on the website and on the ICARE UN-discussion list, which has about 500 subscribers.

*@ After this meeting of the NGOs, how do we get together again for proper preparation of South Africa Conference? That is where our resolves will be put to test. How do we ensure that the governments of the European states will fund NGOs that are seeking a better world for all, where peace and prosperity is the norm?*

*@ The need for the full participation of young people in the World conference is growing day by day. We would like to hear from you and other NGOs in your country, what steps are taken to ensure youth participation in the coming conference and it's follow up.*

Also through I CARE anti-racist and human rights NGOs have been given a chance to register for the Co-ordinating Committee of the NGO preparations to the World Conference. If your organisation wants to get involved, join the UN-discussion list on I CARE at [www.icare.to](http://www.icare.to)!

#### **Support:**

Dutch Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs Switzerland, Council of Europe, Home Office United Kingdom, Vuurwerk Internet

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