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**DECLARATION BY KOLPING INTERNATIONAL  
ON EUROPEAN INTEGRATION AND THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S  
COMMITMENT TO HUMAN RIGHTS  
(Council of Europe Declaration 2008, Brno / Czech Republic)**

Implementing human rights worldwide is one of the key political challenges of our time. Everyone who is interested in ensuring democratic, peaceful and fair co-existence has a duty to contribute to the achievement of this goal. The Kolping Society and its members are also committed to the task, in which connection KOLPING INTERNATIONAL's socio-political guidelines state that "The unique dignity of each human being as a person cannot and must not be erased through legislative measures. The inalienable and inviolable basic human rights, particularly those referring to freedom of faith, religion and conscience, as well as the right to life, must be accepted unconditionally by national as well as international legislative bodies. The more that responsible freedoms are granted to individuals, the fewer are the hardships in society."

**As a COUNCIL OF EUROPE NGO, KOLPING INTERNATIONAL**

- points out that the resolutions adopted 60 years ago in May 1948 at the Congress of Europe in The Hague provided a basis for the drafting of the European Convention on Human Rights and the establishment of the European Court of Human Rights;
- underlines that the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights also adopted 60 years ago in December 1948 provided a key impetus for the COUNCIL OF EUROPE's human rights activities;
- welcomes the fact that the Committee of Ministers of the COUNCIL OF EUROPE has assigned top priority this year to ensuring the long-term efficiency of the European Convention on Human Rights system;
- supports the COUNCIL OF EUROPE's corresponding activities and makes the **following proposals** in this connection:

**1. General points**

- underlines that, although the UN Commissioner for Human Rights and former Irish President, Mary Robinson, believes that Europe is the part of the world where human rights are respected most fully, the possibilities for improving the level of protection are far from exhausted;
- notes that the human rights protection system based on the European Convention with legally binding judgments by the European Court of Human Rights is the most effective in Europe;
- welcomes the fact that the Parliamentary Assembly of the COUNCIL OF EUROPE on 18 April 2007 held, for the first time, a debate on the state of human rights and democracy in Europe, bringing together all the key players in the COUNCIL OF EUROPE's system for protecting and monitoring human rights;
- is pleased to note that, in addition to the European Court of Human Rights and the COUNCIL OF EUROPE Commissioner for Human Rights, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has since March 2008 published an annual report on its activities concerning the Convention on Human Rights, which can be consulted on the Committee of Ministers' website;

- welcomes the fact that the Committee of Ministers' report on supervision of the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in 2007 substantially improves the transparency of the procedure;

## **2. Respect for human rights in connection with the fight against terrorism**

- is pleased to note that the COUNCIL OF EUROPE has stepped up its efforts to combat terrorism since 11 September 2001, in which connection it constantly seeks to ensure a proper balance between the protection of individual freedoms and the demands of collective security against the background of the new forms of terrorism;

## **3. Protection of specific rights**

### **a. Freedom of religion**

- regrets the fact that there are Council of Europe member states where freedom of religion in accordance with Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights still does not exist;

### **b. Prohibition of torture**

- welcomes the fact that the COUNCIL OF EUROPE's efforts to create a Europe free from torture have received fresh impetus from the European Parliament. A resolution adopted by the European Parliament on 8 May 2008 calls on the "Council and the Commission to enhance the co-operation with the COUNCIL OF EUROPE for the purposes of creating a Europe-wide zone free from torture and other forms of ill-treatment, as a clear signal that European countries are firmly committed to eradicating these practices also within their borders";

- urges the COUNCIL OF EUROPE to step up its corresponding activities to combat torture, not least in view of the fact that judgments of the European Court of Human Rights frequently find violations of the Convention on the grounds of inhuman or degrading treatment or even torture;

### **c. Protection of minorities**

- notes that the protection of minorities and, in particular, the rights of Roma are key priorities at the COUNCIL OF EUROPE; regrets the fact that, according to Slovak Foreign Minister Jan Kubis, Roma – who are present as minorities in almost all COUNCIL OF EUROPE member states – still suffer discrimination and are faced with prejudice and hostility;

- is pleased to note that the Assembly is preparing reports on minorities in individual member states (Serbia, Greece and Turkey) and best practices, as well as on shortcomings in the implementation of the standards for protecting minorities in Europe;

### **d. Children's rights**

- welcomes the fact that, under the heading "Building a Europe for and with Children", children's rights are high on the COUNCIL OF EUROPE's agenda;

- is pleased that a new strategy for 2009 to 2011 under the heading "Provision, Protection and Participation for Children in Europe" is being developed, focusing inter alia on eradicating violence against children, improving the participation of children in society and ensuring child-friendly justice;

## **4. Parliamentary Assembly investigations into serious human rights violations**

- is pleased to note that the Parliamentary Assembly of the COUNCIL OF EUROPE has stepped up its investigations into serious human rights violations; following the CIA cases (secret prisons and illegal transfers of prisoners in Europe), investigations have

covered the abuse of the criminal justice system in Belarus, the so-called black list of the UN Security Council and the EU and crimes committed by senior officials in Ukraine during the presidency of Leonid Kuchma;

#### **5. Reform of the Human Rights Convention procedure and workload of the European Court of Human Rights**

- regrets the fact that, four years after being opened for signature, Protocol No 14 to the European Convention on Human Rights, which seeks to reform the procedure for dealing with human rights applications, has still not come into force because of Russia's failure to ratify it; Protocol No 14 would significantly increase the efficiency of the Court and enable it to rule on many more cases;
- hopes that, if Russia does not, after all, ratify the protocol, Council of Europe foreign ministers will discuss the consequences of the situation and alternative solutions by May 2009 at the latest;
- notes that, every year, some 40 000 citizens in COUNCIL OF EUROPE member states allege that their human rights have not been properly protected by the domestic courts and seek to obtain redress before the European Court of Human Rights; although the Court works as efficiently as possible, the number of cases pending has risen dramatically.

#### **6. EU and COUNCIL OF EUROPE: human rights issues**

- welcomes the fact that the agreement between the European Community and the Council of Europe concerning co-operation between the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and the COUNCIL OF EUROPE has been signed and hopes that this paves the way for constructive and complementary co-operation between the two institutions;

In adopting this declaration, KOLPING INTERNATIONAL wishes not only to pay tribute to the COUNCIL OF EUROPE's leading role in protecting and implementing human rights but also actively to support the COUNCIL OF EUROPE continuing to play a pioneering role in expanding and implementing them. We will do so both by sending the declaration to some 1 750 leading public figures throughout Europe and also by addressing the issue in the society's educational work.

**Adopted by the Continental Assembly of the Kolping Society Europe in Brno, Czech Republic, on 16 November 2008.**

Cologne / Brno, 16 November 2008

#### **For KOLPING INTERNATIONAL:**

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**Ottmar Dillenburg**  
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## KOLPING INTERNATIONAL

In 1849 the Catholic priest **Adolph Kolping** founded an association in Cologne for single journeymen in order to give them some help in solving their problems caused by the industrial revolution and being summarized with the term "**social question**".

At the beginning it was a small association, but meanwhile it has developed to a world-wide society that counts today about 6,000 regional groups and 470,000 members in **61 countries**. In spite of the enormous growth and the changed situation in society the Kolping Society has remained true to its original task and is still working towards the solution of the social question. However, this work is not only limited to the national level, it also includes the international level.

The Kolping Society sees itself as a **Catholic social organization**. It supports its members in a special way in developing their personal talents, it offers help to its members and society as a whole and it promotes the common good in the Christian sense with the activities of its members and groups.

The work of the Kolping Society is aimed at the integral individual, who is not only offered help and stimulation in all aspects of life, but also provided with an opportunity to share his problems and also his knowledge and skills. It is the close interconnection and interrelation of the individual spheres of life, which is the starting-point and the ground for the comprehensive work of the Kolping Society and its service towards the integral development of the individual.

According to this approach the work of the Kolping Society concentrates on the following aspects: **work and profession, marriage and family, society and state, culture and leisure time**.

The Kolping Society is a democratically structured organization, and therefore it feels responsible for the promotion of democracy, too. It also fights for the special human dignity in any phase of life and for the inalienable and inviolable human rights.

The Kolping Society in Europe feels in a special way obliged to the European idea – owing to its historical development and its programme – and co-operates intensively with the **Council of Europe** and the **European Union** or the **European Parliament**. Since 1974 it has held the "**Consultative Status at the Council of Europe**" in Strasbourg as NGO (Non-Governmental Organization).

A special sign of this intensive co-operation are the European seminars realized annually for 30 years (1979) in Strasbourg (Palais de l'Europe).

Owing to its world-wide commitment it has furthermore the "**Consultative Status at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations**" and was admitted to the "**Special List of Non-Governmental International Organizations of the International Labour Office (ILO)**".

After the fall of the Iron Curtain in **1989** the International Kolping Society saw an important task in contributing to **develop a civil society** in the formerly communist states, and it did so by building up independent National Organizations. Meanwhile active organizational structures have developed in many Central and East European countries, like for example Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania, Slovakia, Albania etc.. These Kolping Societies have picked up important fields of activity like youth and family work, general and professional training, promotion of small enterprises and social work, but also socio-political education, and they have also undertaken urgent social tasks in self-responsibility.

Although the Kolping Society was founded in Europe and has still kept its international head-quarters in Cologne, it has extended its fields of activity all over the whole world in the meantime. The **promotion of the international co-operation** and solidarity is a central and important task, and the International Kolping Society contributes with its work to solve the international social question.