

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL

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**DECLARATION BY "KOLPING INTERNATIONAL"
ON THE UNIVERSALITY AND INDIVISIBILITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS
AND ITS EXPECTATIONS FROM THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE
(Declaration of the Council of Europe 2011 of Kraków / Poland)**

KOLPING INTERNATIONAL observes with growing concern the discussions in various parts of the world to put into question the universal concept of Human Rights and, with the charge of West-centralism in the existing human rights catalogues, to push through regionally alternative human rights declarations.

As an NGO of the Council of Europe, KOLPING INTERNATIONAL

- calls to mind that during the reconstruction of the international order and the restoration of the law of nations after 1945 the fundamental principles of human dignity and the protection of human rights were of vital significance;
- refers to the rationale of the universal validity of human dignity, as Pope Pius XII outlined in his 1942 Christmas address;
- shares the expectation of Pope John Paul II, who, on the background of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human rights, theorized in 1979 in his first encyclical Redemptor Hominis that human rights will become a world-wide fundamental principle of all endeavours for the common good of mankind;
- emphasizes the statement by the Peace Nobel Prize winner René Cassin that the "Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations" constitutes something like a secular Decalogue;
- stresses that the international protection of human rights has characterizing universalistic features and that this was also the intention of the General Assembly of the United Nations which describes the Declaration of Human Rights as the "common ideal to be achieved by all peoples and nations";
- calls to mind that, since the universal declaration of human rights of 1948, the protection and especially the implementation of these rights were considerably strengthened on the level of the United Nations and on the regional level;

- regrets that the international community is, in practice, still quite a distance away from a world-wide acceptance of the universal validity of human rights.

I) The accusation of West-centralism and/or culturalism of human rights

- 1.- notes that, as a result of the endeavours of the United Nations and regional organizations such as the COUNCIL OF EUROPE, the existence of human rights is recognized by practically all nations;
- 2.- recognizes that, ever since the acceptance of the Declaration of Human Rights (1948.-, ideological debates have taken place as to which ones are the "correct rights";
- 3.- takes into account that up to 1989/90 the ideological conflict was predominantly between East and West and today plays a role rather in the relationship between North and South;
- 4.- regretfully realizes that, particularly in African and Asian circles and in the Islamic area, the accusation of West-centralism of Human Rights is coming up more and more often, and that this "Western model" is considered to be only conditionally suitable for their own culture groups;
- 5.- observes with concern that, due to different points of view, the claim of universal validity of the UN's General Declaration of Human Rights is being put into question;

II Positive developments in the international protection of human rights

- 1.- is pleased that, in spite of the discussions on the universality of human rights, further gains were made in recent years with respect to the protection of human rights;
- 2.- points particularly to the establishing of an International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia and the International Criminal Court with jurisdiction for genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes;
- 3.- feels vindicated by the revolutionary upheavals in North Africa and part of the Arab world, in which the populations are justifying their protests with a clear reference to human rights.

III – Human rights are either universal or they are not

- 1.- strongly emphasizes that cultural and religious considerations and objections must not be more important than the protection of human beings and their rights according to obligatory and accepted standards of the Law of Nations;
- 2.- is strictly against developments, when individual countries have separate penal standards for members of different religions or depending on gender;
- 3.- is aware that social, cultural, and political realities of any given society must be taken into account in actual work done in the area of human rights;
- 4.- sees the need to strengthen the human rights awareness in the different societies as a universal right.

IV – Special responsibility of the COUNCIL OF EUROPE

- 1.- is pleased to note that the COUNCIL OF EUROPE describes the European Human Rights Convention with the possibility of legally checking human rights violations through the European Criminal Courts as one of its greatest achievements;

- 2.- is convinced that the COUNCIL OF EUROPE's international opportunities to influence countries outside of the member states with respect to the acceptance of the universality of human rights depend in an essential way on the credibility and consistency of its own behaviour;
- 3.- would welcome it if the COUNCIL OF EUROPE's Committee of Ministers would utilize its new "Dialogue on Theoretical Questions" to discuss the universality of human rights, including the possibilities of actively supporting this universality vis-à-vis the diversity of cultures and peoples of the world;
- 4.- expects that the COUNCIL OF EUROPE uses great sensitivity in following developments in individual member states and counteracts trends that allow violations of human rights, such as forced marriages, crimes in the name of honour, genital mutilation on the basis of ethnic or religious grounds;
- 5.- strengthens the COUNCIL OF EUROPE in all its initiatives to participate also on the international level in all discussions on the topic of universality of human rights;
- 6.- is aware of the fact that the protection of human rights in Europe is not anchored solely in the European Human Rights Convention but is also distributed to other legal instruments, such as, for instance, the European Social Charter, and that the human rights must be implemented in their entirety;
- 7.- expects from all member states represented in the COUNCIL OF EUROPE that, in view of the overload experienced by the European Tribunal for Human Rights, all must do their part so that the so-called Interlaken-Process for the reform of the Tribunal will be successful;
- 8.- would much appreciate if the European Human Rights Convention and the decisions of the European Tribunal for Human Rights would be taken more into account and implemented in the national administrations and courts of law;
- 9.- calls upon all committees of the COUNCIL OF EUROPE that deal with human rights questions in a broader sense to work out concrete action programs to make sure that more attention is being given to the concerns regarding the protection of human rights.

V The Task for KOLPING INTERNATIONAL

- 1.- stands by the task to work toward an awareness of human rights that emphasizes the universality of human rights;
- 2.- considers itself responsible to increase its educational work on the special dignity of the human being, which is based on a Christian image of Man, and the human rights arising from this dignity;
- 3.- is guided in its commitment to human rights by the thought of Pope John Paul II, who vouched already in his first encyclical *Redemptor Hominis* for the special dignity of the human being, when he wrote: "In reality, the name for that deep amazement at man's worth and dignity is the Gospel, that is to say: the Good News. It is also called Christianity" (# 66);
- 4.- supports the key statement by Pope Benedict XVI that human rights can not apply to only a chosen circle of people.;
- 5.- emphasizes its position that standing up for human rights is still the best way to reduce inequalities between countries and societal groups and to bring about more security.

Ratified by the Continental Assembly of Kolping Europe in Kraców, Poland, on May 1, 2011.

For KOLPING INTERNATIONAL

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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.

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