

29 October 2024

BARCELONA DECLARATION FOR RECLAIMING OUR SHARED HUMANITY

In the framework of the Euro-Med Civil Society Conference held in Barcelona on 26 & 27 October 2024, the Declaration for Reclaiming Our Shared Humanity has been opened for civil society endorsements. The Declaration aims to protect civic spaces for constructive and inclusive dialogue to counter unprecedented polarisation and dehumanisation driven by the escalating violence in the Middle East. This declaration is based on the core values of justice, equal rights, respect for international law and solidarity.

Those who sign this declaration commit to utilize the unique Euro-Mediterranean Civil Society framework and adopt a “bonding strategy” to foster more relational and pluralistic societies, and a cooperative, empathetic, and respectful relationship between countries.

PREAMBLE

We, representatives of civil society, gather at a moment of profound threat to our common humanity.

We stand at the edge of the abyss. As we write, Gaza is facing untold horror – starvation and ethnic cleansing – while violence and conflict has engulfed the Middle East. This horrific escalation has unleashed “a war of narratives” that fans the flames of antisemitism and islamophobia, as well as anti-Arab and anti-Palestinian hatreds. Cohesion within and between our societies is fracturing, and the rule of law and international peace and security are being undermined.

We gather to call on people of conscience who share our concern to help reweave the connective tissue that binds us as a human family.

We gather to reclaim our shared humanity against conflict-driven polarisation, dehumanisation, and hate speech.

We refuse to stand by idly as our societies are dragged further into darkness, and our peoples – whether in the Middle East or in Europe – are forced to suffer continuous trans-generational injustice, trauma, and pain. We are shocked that most Western governments neither condemn nor intervene to stop mass atrocity crimes, as if our most fundamental human rights and humanitarian principles are meaningless.

Responding to the calamity of World War II and the Holocaust, the nations of the world founded the United Nations, adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and signed international treaties to regulate interstate relations, protect our rights, and safeguard both individual and collective freedoms. Yet these collective achievements are being ignored and undermined before our eyes. Without the rigorous and impartial enforcement of international law and accountability for those who perpetrate atrocity crimes, impunity thrives, and justice becomes an exception rather than the rule.

The majority of peoples of the Euro-Mediterranean region consistently indicate that they support international law, seek an end to the current violence, and desire the peaceful resolution of conflicts. They rightly fear that the post-World War II order constructed to protect us, and our rights are wilfully being torn down for the sake of racialized geopolitics.

So far, too many political leaders have failed to live up to the expectations of their publics and the stakes of international law, thereby disregarding elementary principles of our common humanity and violating their mandate. In view of this failure, confidence in our governments and in global governance is diminishing.

This situation presents nothing less than a state of emergency.

Civil society is now forced to remind world leaders of their duties and solemn commitments to international law and humanitarian norms. We, therefore, stand together now to assert the following declarations and demands,

We declare:

1. We firmly believe that all peoples of the region, including Israeli Jews and Palestinians are entitled to self-determination, should live in freedom and dignity, free from any form of terror and violence, and enjoy equal rights and full citizenship.
2. We strongly reject illegal occupation, mass incarceration, the taking of civilians as hostages, indiscriminate bombing, displacement, and starvation as a weapon of war anywhere and at all times.
3. We strongly condemn all forms of violence directed against civilians, including on 7 October 2023, as well as decades of occupation, settlement policies, and home demolitions, and demand the prosecution of violators of international humanitarian law regardless of the identity of perpetrators or victims.
4. We strongly reject all forms of racism, discrimination, dehumanization or hate speech against any group of people based on their objectified identities and national, ethnic or religious origins, particularly during violent conflict.
5. We reject the exploitation of the memory of one crime to vilify protest against another. We oppose the use of antisemitism accusations, often invoking the IHRA Working Definition of antisemitism, for political goals. We acknowledge initiatives like The Jerusalem Declaration on Antisemitism (JDA) and others that seek a better approach and distinguish between antisemitism and legitimate criticisms of the conduct of the State of Israel.
6. We recall that the current escalation in the Middle East occurs against the background of a comprehensive regional peace offer, the Arab Peace Initiative (API) of 2002, in line with international law and continuously endorsed by 57 Arab and Muslim states, which has been ignored by the Israeli government for the past 22 years.

On the basis of these principles, we call for:

7. The immediate implementation of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) provisional measures ruling to stop the killing in the Gaza strip, to dramatically surge the entry of humanitarian aid at scale, and to ensure release of the hostages,
8. All EU and Euro-Mediterranean states and institutions to no longer fuel the escalation of armed conflict by providing weapons to the belligerent parties.

9. The immediate and nonselective enforcement of international law, consistent with the ICJ Advisory Opinion of 2024 on the illegality of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories, and the immediate implementation of the UNSC resolution 1701 from 2006.
10. The immediate, unhindered access of international journalists to Gaza, the protection of local media workers, as well as full cooperation with UN-mandated investigators in line with legally binding orders of the ICJ.
11. States to denounce and take all necessary action against any public and private pressure campaigns and/or access restrictions impacting freedom of the press.
12. Regulatory authorities and social media companies to assume their responsibility to counter polarisation, dehumanisation, and radicalisation driven by misinformation and algorithms; and for the media to ensure professional, ethical and fact-based reporting providing all relevant information and context.
13. Full respect for the right to education in a safe environment, particularly for the displaced.
14. Advancing women's agency, empowerment, decision-making and representation in peacebuilding and in all matters concerning the future of their people, in compliance with UNSC 1325, fully incorporating a gender perspective and reclaiming the principle of feminist-led foreign policy.
15. Governments to support academic freedom and lift impediments on free speech that effectively restrict cooperation and repress activism in support of human rights and a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis.
16. To provide protections in law for artists, writers, academics, and those who advocate for peace and understanding or who protest the war in order to prevent the organized campaigns aimed at silencing them.
17. The use of available infrastructure, instruments, and resources and the creation of needed new ones to foster networks of solidarity and dialogue between civil society actors across the Euro-Mediterranean region to reclaim our shared humanity, and civil society peacebuilders and activists in the Middle East.
18. Support a civil-society-led peace process through the creation of citizens assemblies in the region, composed of randomly selected citizens, representing their society in the broadest possible ways across generations and social background. These assemblies should pave the way for a peace-assembly bringing together Palestinians, Israeli Jews, and neighbouring peoples.

This declaration expresses a collective commitment for reclaiming our shared humanity by refusing the logic of war and its ramifications through conflict-driven polarisation, dehumanisation, and hate speech. The implementation of this declaration will be ensured by the establishment of a "Euro-Mediterranean Advisory Council on Reclaiming our Shared Humanity" tasked to monitor next steps and develop an action plan to implement these demands.