

Joint Statement of the 2016 ALF Advisory Council

Rome, 8 September 2016

The following statement was delivered today by members of the Advisory Council of the Anna Lindh Foundation, the institution's think-tank mandated to advise the Foundation's 42-country intergovernmental Board, regional network of 4500+CSOs, and international secretariat in Alexandria. The Advisory Council meeting in Rome was presided by the President of the Anna Lindh Foundation, Elisabeth Guigou, with members from Europe, North Africa and the Middle East.

“At the end of an intense day of strategic discussion, we say that for all of us working for a common Mediterranean future – governments, young leaders, civil society, individual citizens – it is more urgent than ever to accelerate and scale-up intercultural action in the face of unprecedented regional challenges.

One year on from our 2015 annual meeting in Rome, we share the view that the region's socio-political environment has worsened even further, against a backdrop of forces fuelling polarisation within and across the societies of the Mediterranean. The impact of shared challenges, from a refugee crisis to youth unemployment, has the potential to give way to a more potent, long-lasting threat: the cultural divide.

We collectively believe that Intercultural Dialogue, framed as a long-term sustainable solution to improve quality of life in the region, is a central instrument today for peace and security, as well as addressing the underlying causes of extremism and promoting community reconciliation. Intercultural dialogue, which must be a shared south/north concept, is more critical than ever to address pressing issues of modern day life and offer a positive perspective and means for sustainable success as a key pillar of the UN Development Goals. It is for this reason that we call upon governments and regional actors to invest in priority areas of intercultural action, and ensure there is no gap between the renewed regional policies for dialogue and the related resourcing of action in the field.

We equally state that “closure is not the answer” to the deep and complex challenges facing societies to the north and south of Mare Nostrum. We believe that we must open up dialogue and maximise the contribution of migrants as cultural bridges, and collective actions must be reinforced to create a positive framework for the future and for youth today to build an open, shared and prosperous regional community. Growing prejudice is a major threat to International Security, while International Migration is also an opportunity for the societies of tomorrow.

We believe that the Anna Lindh Foundation's strategic focus on “Investment in Youth” and “Working Through Partnership” remains the right roadmap, and that there are special contexts the Foundation must also now consider: Cities and Media.

The successful city of the future will be intercultural. In an increasingly urbanised Euro-Med zone, cities offer special challenges but also opportunities for positive intercultural dialogue. They present a landscape where intercultural encounters and flows of people provide opening for new forms of cultural expression and creative enterprise to develop new social and commercial networks, and eventually new realities of cultural diversity.

We also recognise the potential of media to address the gap in public perceptions that is being exploited by those movements of division. There is a new generation of journalists, to the north and south, who require increasing support to report on our region's complex social and cultural realities. We equally call on media owners and authorities to recognise the risk to our future societies in feeding a “clash of ignorance” and promoting diverging narratives among citizens of the region.

Mobility represents the first right of the Mediterranean, and increasing exchange is central and interconnected to international security, fighting terrorism and extremist narratives. The Euro-Mediterranean region has a historic opportunity to activate connections among the next generation of dialogue leaders and fuel the largest ever growth in



people-to-people exchange. Virtual education exchange will have an increasing role in widening access and deepening the impact of face-to-face encounters.

These pillars of intercultural action remain framed in the new strategy of the Anna Lindh Foundation, backed in 2015 by the 42 Member States of the Union for the Mediterranean ("Working Together Towards 2025"), and are central to transforming the Foundation into the region's reference point for and guardian of intercultural dialogue. Investment in longer-term, strategic developments for the Foundation, through a new data-driven communication policy and access to expertise, voices and innovative practice, will be key to conveying the Foundation's message across the region's societies.

The following step on this roadmap will be next month's MEDITERRANEAN FORUM, the largest civil society gathering and most influential process of its kind for intercultural dialogue (Valletta, 23-25 October), and the Advisory Council is giving its full backing to the identified Strategic Pillars. Timed to take place on the eve of the Malta's landmark EU Presidency, the Forum will be the platform to: launch the flagship YOUNG MEDITERRANEAN VOICES; present the preliminary results of the Foundation's INTERCULTURAL TRENDS REPORT; share the outcomes of TRANSLATION FOR THE MEDITERRANEAN; launch a regional alumni network for MEDIA REPORTERS ACROSS CULTURES; initiate a new policy on MED CITIES FOR DIALOGUE; and build support for a pioneering ERASMUS OF ASSOCIATIONS.

Malta will also represent an unprecedented call to action. A catalyst for collaboration among the main regional actors for dialogue and the Foundation's Network of Civil Society Networks; a far-reaching coalition of values to frame the future of Euro-Mediterranean Dialogue. We collectively believe that now is the time to act together and transform intercultural dialogue into intercultural action across our region's civil societies."