



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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NOTE

from :	the Presidency
to :	Heads of State or Government
Subject :	Statement on inter-faith dialogue and social cohesion

At their meeting on 28 November 2003, The Ministers of Interior and/or Justice took note of the outcome of the Conference on interfaith dialogue organised by the Presidency in Rome on 30 and 31 October 2003. They expressed a broad consensus on the attached Statement on Inter-faith dialogue and social cohesion, and decided to bring it to the attention of Heads of State or Government.

STATEMENT ON INTER-FAITH DIALOGUE
AND SOCIAL COHESION

The Ministers of the Member States of the European Union and of the Acceding States, responsible for Home Affairs and/or Justice, called on to guarantee freedom, security and peaceful and democratic coexistence in our own Countries and in all Europe;

Recalling the principles enshrined in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, in the Treaty of Amsterdam and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in particular freedom of thought, conscience and religion;

In consideration of the discussions held during the Conference on “Inter-faith dialogue—a social cohesion factor in Europe and an instrument of peace in the Mediterranean area”, which took place in Rome on 30th and 31 October 2003 as well as the solemn address of His Holiness the Pope, John Paul II at the special audience reserved to the participants in the Conference, all the proceedings being annexed to the present;

Convinced that the plurality and diversity of languages, cultures, philosophical and religious ideas are part of the great heritage and historical identity of Europe - a “Nation with a hundred facets” – and that exactly this wealth may give strength to European society;

Convinced that Europe, respectful of the dignity of mankind and being the recipient land of different cultures, should not fear diversity but embrace it, in a spirit of mutual respect;

Aware that at the present time an important contribution to the development of a free, peaceful, orderly and cohesive society may be made by dialogue;

Convinced that religious faiths and philosophical convictions have the intrinsic resources to build mutual confidence and co-operation among individuals and among peoples;

Aware that dialogue helps to overcome philosophical and religious extremism, stereotypes and prejudices, ignorance and indifference, intolerance and hostility, which even in the recent past have caused tragic conflicts and bloodshed in Europe;

Convinced, in particular, that dialogue between people of different philosophical and religious convictions and cultural backgrounds may made an essential contribution to building peace and to development in the common Mediterranean area and all over the world;

Convinced that such a dialogue favours the development of social cohesion in Europe, the-respect for human dignity and the observance of rule of law;

Having given already an orientation during their meeting of November 6, 2003 in favour of both the adoption of a Statement on Inter-faith Dialogue and Social Cohesion and the desirability of an open and transparent dialogue with the various religious and philosophical communities,

STATE

1. that the value of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion is as an inalienable right in societies based on democratic values and the rule of law;
2. their will to support dialogue as an instrument of peace and social cohesion in Europe and at its borders;
3. their conviction that such dialogue may help the new generations of Europeans to avoid the mistakes of the past;
4. their total rejection of any form of extremism and intolerance which undermines peaceful and democratic coexistence and their condemnation of any type of violence and terrorism; religion should not be used as a pretext for hate and violence;
5. their commitment both to promote tolerance, overcoming philosophical and religious extremism and to pursue the fight against any kind of racism and xenophobia.

Drawing on the principles and values of this Statement, the Ministers of Home Affairs and/or Justice underline the importance of a sustained, open and transparent dialogue with the different religious and philosophical communities in Europe.
