



5TH INTERNATIONAL MAYORS' CONFERENCE

Final Declaration of the 5th NOW Conference

Shaping the Future - Social Cohesion in our Cities

In times of increasing polarization sensitivity, empathy, and a sense of responsibility are more important than ever. We need to guarantee that human rights and the rights of children, in particular, are respected and implemented without exception. In doing so we need to strengthen those who are disadvantaged, excluded, or prosecuted.

Refugees are neither the cause nor the trigger of the crisis in our democratic societies. Poor education and youth unemployment for instance, have been issues long before people from Syria or Afghanistan had to flee to Europe. It is hence all the more important today to step up our awareness for social and economic inequalities of all kinds.

In order to make sure that children and adolescents can live their lives in safety, dignity, and prosperity we must focus both our thinking and actions on propagating and strengthening social cohesion in our immediate vicinity, in our communities, in our municipalities, and in our cities and countries.

Women, children, and adolescents are prone to be the first victims of social discrimination. Whenever declining living standards, unequal educational opportunities, and cracks in the welfare networks are wreaking havoc in our societies, it is especially the youngest and the weakest who suffer most. Therefore it is absolutely necessary to break up the old destructive discourse patterns of THEM-against-US and instead settle on an approach of solidarity, focusing on what unites us as human beings, on what we share – now, in our joint presence, with a view to our common future.

Mobility and migration have always been part of life in our cities. What is important is not where the people present in our city, in any specific city, at any given time came from originally. If the focus is on the future we agree with sociologist Mark Terkessidis: the only thing that truly counts, is that these people are here now and are part of our common future.

An international network of humanity and attentiveness, information and assistance has been created over these past two years and in the course of the first four NOW Conferences. This network has already proved itself strong and useful on many occasions and in different contexts and will further contribute to develop a solid basis for the future commitment of individuals and groups, of institutions and communities.

At the end of January 2018 the 5th International Mayors' Conference NOW has therefore focused on how to boost the strengths of social cohesion in our municipalities, thereby allowing children and adolescents to live blessed, fulfilled lives. Here is a short extract from contributions to the debate:

"Our goal must be a society in which each of us must find a place to live, where everyone living in Vienna is Viennese. This is what we must advocate." (Jürgen Czernohorsky)

"We must discard all those impediments that keep people from participating in society."
(Nicholas You)





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"We have an obligation to safeguard human rights, promote social cohesion, and support people in developing trust and a feeling of belonging." (Viola Raheb)

"It is indispensable to do justice to the autonomous contribution of children and adolescents to social cohesion, take their expectations seriously, and make sure that they are not denied human rights." (Helmut Sax)

"We must create possibilities for people to legally come to Europe on humanitarian corridors." (Federica Brizi)

"We need trust, we need courage, we need resources – this will create many possibilities." (Helge Lunde)

"We can't get by without networks. If we act alone, we stay alone." (Benedetto Zacchirolli)

"Within two years we have grown into a community, attuned to each other, and determined to come up with joint answers to the challenges of our times – answers which we make available to all stakeholders." (André Heller, Patricia Kahane, Elke Zuckermann)

Several communal networks represented at the 5th International Mayors' Conference NOW – European Cities Against Racism, Mediterranean Hope, Child Friendly Cities Initiative, ICORN, Mediterranean Hope and others – have agreed to start a cooperation in order to put out there their expertise and ideas for sharing, replicating, scaling and adapting in other communities' contexts. A first networking workshop has been agreed upon in a joint letter of intent.

It is time to act. Let's Act Now - together!
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Act.Now GmbH
Hohe Warte 28/3
1190 Vienna, Austria
UID: ATU 70201729
Fn 446619v

T: +43 1 890 90 05
F: +43 1 890 90 05-5
office@act-n-o-w.com

Erste Bank Österreich
IBAN AT54 2011 1827 9633 4200
BIC GIBAATWWXXX

www.now-conference.org
www.act-n-o-w.com

