

GENERAL DEBATE, Speaker no. 42

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Senator Francesco Maria AMORUSO

Honorary President, Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM)

Mr President, honourable colleagues,

I am delighted to be here today on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. This meeting is taking place at a crucial time for our region: conflicts, terrorism, the return of IS foreign fighters from Syria and Libya, mass migration from Africa to Europe are the main concerns shared by our countries.

The rise of xenophobia and violence, linked to religious intolerance and refusal to integrate in the countries of residence are threatening the century-old Mediterranean culture of ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism and openness.

PAM has always focused on these matters. In the Italian Senate in Rome, we have organized a conference on dialogue among cultures and religions, and the role of education in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism. The event enabled MPs from several countries to exchange good practices on religious pluralism and to study freedom of worship and religious coexistence in the Mediterranean region.

We focused on the Moroccan model, most notably the training of imams. Soon after the meeting, the Parliament of Morocco received a PAM delegation, which met the Kingdom's highest religious and political authorities. During the visit, the Italian parliamentary delegation requested, on behalf of the Italian government, to collaborate with the Ulema School to certify Imams operating in Italy, as is already being done in several European and African countries.

PAM is convinced that interreligious and intercultural dialogue and the acceptance of fundamental values such as democracy, respect for human dignity and the rule of law are the best tools available to respond to the threat of violence and extremism. Religious authorities play a key role in the promotion of peaceful coexistence and integration, in compliance with the national legislation of the host country.

It is important to recall that proper intercultural dialogue can only exist if human rights and fundamental freedoms -- including freedom of expression, religion and conscience -- are protected and ensured.

We Members of Parliament have the responsibility and the duty to adopt such laws as are necessary to fight against hatred, discrimination and intolerance. These measures should comply with national and international commitments on human rights and asylum.

PAM regularly organizes seminars for its members, at the UN High Commissioners for Human Rights and Refugees, the Alliance of Civilizations in Geneva and the European Court in Strasbourg, in order to increase our capability to act.

For PAM, investing in the young and in education is of the utmost importance. The young must be given opportunities for social and economic progress to better equip them to face common challenges, like unemployment and the radicalization which might derive from it.

There can be no peace without tolerance, no tolerance without dialogue and mutual respect.

Thank you.