

## **Meeting between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Jan Figel, Brussels, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2016**

Jan Figel presented his new function within the EU architecture as first ever Special Envoy on Freedom of Religion or Belief. He briefly exposed his vision, working methods and political priorities. Main themes discussed have been religious dialogue, mainly with Muslims, possible new initiatives in this respect in India, European construction as a positive model to create a global world, united in its diversity, and the key role of education.

HH the Dalai Lama welcomed the creation of the EU Special Envoy position on FoRB and congratulated Jan Figel to be the first ever Special Envoy. HH Dalai Lama then spoke about interfaith dialogue and the importance of inter-confessional harmony.

He recalled as exemplary the experience of 2000 years of peaceful cohabitation and harmony of different religions in India, insisting on the fact that harmony is generated by close contact. Indian Muslims should convey inter-religious encounters, sharing their long and sound practice of cohabitation. In order to foster peace among religions, he recommended a two pronged approach : organize regular encounters of religious leaders at high level and in complement offer religious scholars from different confessions opportunities to deepen exchanges and understanding each other, spending together at least 3/ 4 days. Time together and close contact is needed to overcome divides and build common understanding. Recalling inter-monastic gatherings also between different religions, HH the Dalai Lama insisted on the fact that human contact is essential to build harmony. He expressed that different philosophical and religious traditions are paths towards a common goal which is happiness, a "happy humanity".

In this vein, another powerful vector of mutual knowledge is to organize visits or pilgrimages of holy places of different confessions and pray or meditate together. The pope John Paul II organized the first interreligious meeting in Assisi. This year, on 18-20 September, there will be a commemorative interfaith celebration, again in Assisi, with participation of Pope Francis. In line with this interfaith dialogue perspective, Pope Francis visited besieged mosque in Central African Republic during his stay in November 2015 (NB: President of the CAR will take part at the Assisi Meeting).

Furthermore, HH the Dalai Lama recalled the importance of education. He stressed the need of scientific education combined with education of values, which is about deepening our understanding of reality in a more holistic way. Teachers and religious leaders should join forces to help the youngest understand the concept of "oneness", the unity of the mankind. He expressed his intention to develop a "curriculum on ethics" based on common moral values, which are not linked to any particular religious or belief tradition. Politicians, due to the fact of the nature of political competition, are not in an easy position to do this. However, global problems, such as climate change and environmental challenges, as well as the issue of poverty and inequality, cannot be tackled by individual countries, but only within a common effort.

With this respect Jan Figel recalled his experience as a Commissioner for Education, Culture and Youth and his second meeting with HH Dalai Lama in November 2008 in New Delhi. Then he reflected on the history of his own country, Slovakia that is now holding the Presidency of the council of the EU. A political transformation of a communist country to a democratic one is a tremendous challenge. He said that while is easy to divide, it requires effort to build unity. Unity is

not uniformity, and the objective should be to achieve, in line with the political philosophy underlying European construction, unity respecting diversity.

Reflecting these thoughts, HH the Dalai Lama spoke about the history of the European construction recalling how the French German conflict was solved and reconciliation succeeded after war. The lessons learned from the failure of communism and authoritarian regimes were also recalled. Notwithstanding the current difficulties, Europe should work to make the 'European spirit' thrive again and spread out of Europe in other continents, including Asia, in particular taking into account the relationship between India and China as the world's most populous countries, home for 2.5 billion people.

To conclude His Holiness informed Jan Figel on his initiative on education stressing its the importance in the current context. It consists in developing a teaching curriculum for secular ethics that could fit in the secular education field. He informed the Special Envoy that a draft curriculum on secular ethics has been developed with the help of Emory University. This secular education curriculum was based on scientific education in combination with our common sense and experiences. Further meetings and discussions in India and the U.S.A. are planned later in the year to finalize the draft curriculum that will be ready in 2017. Jan Figel expressed his interest in this initiative.