



16.11.2016 – As the UN marks the [International Day of Tolerance](#), it underlines the importance of mutual understanding between cultures and peoples, especially in this era of rising intolerance and xenophobia in Europe.

The [European Commission against Racism and Intolerance](#) identified some worrying trends in its 2015 annual report.

ECRI observed both a rise in anti-Semitism and continued discrimination against black persons, Roma, Travelers, historical ethnic minorities and LGBTI people. As a result of the ongoing migration crisis and Islamist terror attacks, a growing anti-immigrant sentiment as well as islamophobia have taken hold in Europe.

In some countries the refugee crisis sparked an outpouring of solidarity and many local volunteers together with central authorities were committed to making the newcomers arriving in their towns feel welcome. In other countries, however, the opposite happened and restrictive border policies combined with a toxic rhetoric have created an openly hostile environment for refugees and migrants.

Earlier this year, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra'ad Al Hussein addressed this problem during his speech at The Hague Talks on the role of today's generation for tomorrow's peace. The High Commissioner warned that this type of language used by populists and demagogues can descend into colossal violence. "History has perhaps taught Mr. Wilders and his ilk how effectively xenophobia and bigotry can be weaponized," Zeid said, "Communities will barricade themselves into fearful, hostile camps, with populists like them, and the extremists, as the commandants."

In order to promote tolerance, dispel myths about migrants and promote global action in support of non-discrimination, the UN launched the TOGETHER campaign at the UN Summit on Refugees and Migrants in September. This UN System-wide initiative led by the Secretary-General will be implemented in partnership with Member States, the private sector and civil society and aims to speak to communities hosting refugees and migrants. The campaign hopes to bring about a global movement to counter and change negative attitudes towards refugees and migrants, entering into dialogue with people concerned that refugees and migrants may bring physical and economic insecurity to their lives.

In her message for this year's International Day for Tolerance, Irina Bokova, the Director-General of UNESCO stressed the importance of tolerance in fostering sustainable development: "In a world of diversity, tolerance is a prerequisite for peace. It is also a lever for sustainable development, as it encourages the construction of more inclusive and thus more resilient societies that are able to draw on the ideas, creative energy and talents of each of their members."

### **Additional links:**

- [International Day of Tolerance](#)
- [European Commission against Racism](#)