

The Council for Dignity, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation

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During the week of April 19, 2010 I was in Rome attending meetings as a member of the Council for Dignity, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation. Created by Maria Nicoletta Gaida the Council is part of the Ara Pacis Initiative initiated by the Global Forum Italy Foundation and promoted by the City of Rome with the High Patronage of the Republic of Italy and under the auspices of the Prime Minister and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Ara Pacis Initiative is dedicated to the human dimension of peace before, during and after conflict. This project has attracted the active interest of the President of the State of Israel, Shimon Peres, and the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, and has been favorably received by H.M. Mohammed VI, the King of Morocco.

The project aims to launch an active reflection on forgiveness, in its various religious and cultural meanings, as a moral, spiritual and political tool for achieving reconciliation among peoples – with a particular focus on the Mediterranean and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This is an initiative that will bring to light and recognize the root causes of contemporary suffering and the wounds buried deep in collective memory in order to restore dignity to those who have suffered, thereby creating the premise for a reconciliation that allows for the building of a common future.

The heart of the Ara Pacis Initiative is the Council for Dignity, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation, made up primarily of men and women who have suffered personally because of armed conflict and who have chosen the path of forgiveness, and forgiveness and reconciliation experts and practitioners who work to imagine a new community, to propose the way of political forgiveness, and to develop ongoing activities aimed at raising awareness of the necessity of working on the path of forgiveness/reconciliation through education as well as intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in all fields. Through concrete projects the Council will aim to transform relations between communities in conflict to help them take the paths of reconciliation. The work of the Council will be to share their knowledge, experiences and insight concerning dignity, forgiveness and reconciliation, and initiating projects such as sending small teams of experts to promote approaches rarely used, but dramatically necessary – like forgiveness with justice, restoring dignity, and healing from trauma.

The Council will work in strict coordination with the national and international diplomatic channels and in collaboration with grassroots organizations active on the ground – on initiatives promoting reflection and participation of the various populations in the area of forgiveness. It will guide the activities related to the gathering and documenting of testimonies of conflict victims to memorialize them, as well as the selection of representatives of the victims from all sides – as victimization from hate and violence leaves no side untouched – to participate in the Council's hearings.