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## Living Library on World Refugee Day

Council of Europe, 20 – 22 June 2011

FINAL REPORT

Organisers:

**Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe  
Youth Department of the Council of Europe  
UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees**



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## **Introduction to the report**

This report gathers the findings, questions and results that surrounded the “Living Library” event co-organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Youth Department of the Council of Europe and the UNHCR – United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in June 2011.

The report intends to give a descriptive perspective on the event and at the same time to raise questions and “food for thought” for future similar events.

## **Background**

In the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, a refugee is defined as any person who “owing to well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it” (Article 1,A).

The right to seek asylum in other countries is a human right enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 14) and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 18)

The UNHCR has estimated that the number of refugees of concern to UNHCR stood at 10.4 million refugees at the beginning of 2011, down slightly from a year earlier. It was also estimated that only by the 10 May 2011 some 34 460 persons arrived to Italy comprising about 23 000 irregular migrants and 11 000 asylum seekers/refugees, and 1 106 to Malta (almost all asylum seekers or refugees), only due to the situation in North Africa.

The situation of asylum-seekers and refugees in Europe today is very complex and often refugees and asylum-seekers and victims of ill-treatment and violations of their human rights. Even if Europe is not the primary continent in terms of numbers of refugees, it is important to acknowledge that in the recent years there has been in several European countries a rise in hostile feelings towards refugees, complemented by a partial confusion in terms and perceptions regarding refugees and economic migrants. Refugees fall often victims of xenophobia and are more and more the objects of nationalist political discourse and scapegoating attitudes in many places in Europe.

The legal procedures in most of the European countries of the European Union, to take just one example, have proved too complicated for people who flee from lack of security and threats to their human dignity. The need for responsibility sharing and coordination between European states has been reiterated recently, because some countries are more under pressure than others. In fact, the risk of the legal system as it is in place now in many countries is that asylum-seekers are often detained in violation of Article 5 ECHR.

These difficulties combined with a rising fear of the foreigner, a widespread intolerance and the return of nationalistic discourses in several countries have contributed to bringing about the image of the “fortress Europe” and, on the other hand, have undermined the chances of refugees and asylum-seekers to lead a life of decency and dignity in their “host” countries,

risking on a daily basis xenophobic attitudes, discrimination in different areas of life, vulnerability and exclusion.

### **Introduction to the activity**

Since 2001, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) celebrates the 20 June as the **World Refugee Day**, dedicated to raising awareness of the situation of refugees throughout the world. 2011 is a very special year as it coincides with the **60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees** and the **50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness**.

The celebrations carried out during 2011 by the UNHCR had the purpose firstly, to strengthen the existing protection regime and promote a new protection dynamic. This could include exploring innovative ways to address protection gaps, including how regional protection or cooperation arrangements could most effectively be employed in parallel with national asylum systems. Secondly, another objective was to attain greater support for the statelessness conventions, including new accessions, as well as better mapping of the statelessness problem and more effective ways to respond. Thirdly, UNHCR celebrations aimed at raising public awareness and build solidarity with forcibly displaced and stateless persons, through a communications strategy aimed to influence public opinion and expand protection space.

On the 20 June, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees António Guterres stated that it was time for individuals and states to recommit to the humanitarian values enshrined in the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. He stressed that **"We have to do more to keep borders open and guarantee access to fair asylum procedures everywhere"**. The UNHCR annual report shows that the number of forcibly displaced people in the world is nearly 44 million. It also reveals a deep imbalance in international support for the forcibly displaced, with 80 per cent of the world's refugees being hosted by developing countries.

The situation of refugees in Europe calls for stronger cooperation at European level through actions within the respect of a human rights framework. The role of the Council of Europe in this process is crucial. In June 2011, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe discussed two reports prepared by the Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population related to the situation of refugees and asylum-seekers, namely **"The interception and rescue at sea of asylum seekers, refugees and irregular migrants"** (Recommendation 1974 (2011) and **"Asylum seekers and refugees: sharing responsibilities in Europe"** (Resolution 1820 (2011)<http://assembly.coe.int/Mainf.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta11/ERES1820.htm> - P16 115).



In his opening speech of the Living Library on the 20 June, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu has affirmed that **"Europe has not lost its vocation as a place where people fleeing conflicts and persecution seek protection"**.

In fact, during the June Session of the Parliamentary Assembly it was reminded to the Member States of the Council of Europe on several occasions of their obligations

under the Geneva Convention and of the need for Europe to share responsibilities.

The position of the youth sector of the Council of Europe when it comes to young refugees and asylum-seekers has been linked in the recent years with several activities organised in the European Youth Centres that testify of the continuous interest and need for capacity-building of civil society, and specifically youth organisations all over Europe, to involve young migrants and to take a stand in the overall debate. The 2001 “Hearing on the specific situation of young refugees”, the 2006 seminar “Raising young refugees’ voices in Europe and beyond”, combined with the support to the creation and growth of VYRE Network – Voices of Young Refugees in Europe are just some of the telling examples of the effort the Youth Department has made on this theme. Consequently, in its priorities 2012-2013, the youth sector particularly included under the heading “Living together in diverse societies: youth policy and youth work promoting intercultural dialogue”, a specific priority aimed to develop tools and resources with a view to supporting intercultural youth work in multicultural environments, involving in particular young migrants, asylum seekers and internally displaced persons.

The youth sector of the Council of Europe has also been in the last almost 40 years a place where youth policy at European begins. Youth policy as a framework for the improvement of all young people’s living conditions and supporting them in realising their potential. The youth sector of the Council of Europe has carried out programmes at both educational and policy levels, in line with the major evidence-based youth challenges in Europe, within the wider framework of the Organisation’s values. Within this framework, the work with young refugees and asylum-seekers has played recently a strategical role: firstly, make young refugees’ voices heard, raise awareness about human rights for all (in accordance with the “all different-all equal” campaign slogan), but also strengthen participation and inclusion in society, building also the capacity of youth organisations to act for and with young refugees for their place in society and their rights. The underlining concern has been to bring to the public arena and reduce the levels of humiliation in the case of an often invisible social group. Intercultural dialogue and learning have been core in this process. An example in this endeavour is the Living Library.

The Living Library was included in the youth sector programmes in 2003. The underlining idea of the youth sector programmes and of the Living Library in particular is *that human rights cannot be defended by legal texts alone. They need to be protected and fostered by everyone. In order to encourage citizens to think about their own human rights and those of the Other, awareness needs to be raised in the wider public about the importance of human rights for the personal well-being of all.*

The Living Library has grown from 2003 until the present moment and has kept being a unique format for addressing the topic of awareness-raising about human rights, diversity and for tackling prejudices, stereotypes and discrimination. Each year, all over Europe different formats of the Living Library are organised. An organiser’s guide published in 2005 and a training course for organisers are complementing the process.

### **The event, step by step**



The 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Geneva Convention was calling for a special event to be organised in Strasbourg. Something different. But at the same time, something that would fit in the little time that all the other event (the less different ones, seminars, debates, conferences etc.) left.

Following a proposal of the **Youth Department of the Council of Europe**, the **Committee on Migration, Refugees and Population of the Parliamentary Assembly** of the Council of Europe and the **UNHCR** joined efforts and organise a **Living Library**, to take place during the Parliamentary Assembly in June 2011 on 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> June, in the forum of the Hemicycle in the Council of Europe's main building.

The Living Library functions in exactly the same way as a traditional library. That is, the "readers" may borrow a "book" for a limited duration of time. The only difference is that **the "books" are human beings** – in this particular context, they were to be refugees, asylum seekers and stateless persons, professionals working directly with these groups etc. – who are often subject to prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination or social exclusion.

Several meetings were needed in this common effort, firstly to define, share progress and adjust the roles of the three partners and, secondly, to prepare the library as such, thus books, librarians, dictionaries and a whole range of "technical personnel" to make sure that on the 20<sup>th</sup> June at 17 o'clock when the Opening Ceremony was due, the Library would welcome its first readers.

The organisation of a Living Library required first and foremost the involvement of local organisations that could, through their direct work, support the organisers in identifying potential books. Meetings were organised and local organisations invited responded positively, namely **Amnesty International, CADA et le Foyer de Notre Dame, THEMIS, CASAS, La CIMADE**. The UNHCR had also an important role in identifying potential books.

Most of the books were from Strasbourg and surrounding areas, but there were also four refugees residing in other Council of Europe's Member States, in order to give an European perspective. The invited books reside now in Sweden, Austria, United Kingdom and Italy.

As it is a *living* library, most of the preparation deals with preparing human beings for entering their book experience... This is a process that does not happen in one day. At least in our case, it implied passion, commitment, curiosity and enthusiasm for such a new way of raising the voices of refugees and asylum-seekers in Europe today, but also doubts and concerns that the activity would risk strengthening those stereotypes it tried to address and overcome.



The preparatory phase of the Living Library included concretely:

- Information preparation with local organisations
- Identifying, preparing and training the 18 books involved in the process
- Training the 12 librarians and dictionaries for their roles

- Preparing the whole set of visual identity items, like T-shirts, banners, reader's passes, catalogues etc.
- Promoting the event and making sure that on the 20<sup>th</sup> June as many people with access to the Council of Europe's main building as possible would at least show some curiosity to this unusual event, quite different from the more usual conferences, debates and meetings that a Parliamentary Assembly session includes
- Preparing small and enjoyable surprises, as a Golden Book for readers and books to share their experiences and feeling after the Living Library experience or getting some of the real books our books wrote in the Council of Europe's bookshop, as a complement to the living books
- Preparing for the whole world of protocol arrangements an official opening implies

The preparatory phase of the Living Library started in March 2011 and ended, as it was supposed to, on the 20<sup>th</sup> June with the Official Opening ceremony where different personalities from the Council of Europe, the UNHCR, the City Hall of Strasbourg made a welcome speech and very given the privilege to be the first to borrow a book.

The Living Library then **ran on Tuesday, 21 June, from 10 until 18 o'clock and on Wednesday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> June, from 10 to 18 o'clock**. The members of the Parliamentary Assembly and all people with access to the Council of Europe's main building had during this timetable the unique opportunity to "borrow living books" and "read" them through establishing a dialogue. The goal of this unique exercise in the landscape of the Council of Europe was obviously to combat prejudices that we all have in ourselves and be more aware of the problems facing refugees, asylum-seekers and stateless persons, and also the professionals working directly with these groups.



After the event, an evaluation and celebration meeting was organised with the organisers, books, librarians and dictionaries. All those involved needed to debrief the activity, to take stock of the human and the learning experience each person involved in the event underwent and to cherish the courage of those who for two days shared their personal life experiences with perfect strangers in an effort to promote intercultural dialogue, raise awareness about human rights in daily life experiences and bring about a step more in social change.

### **Why and what for?**

The leaflet prepared for the Living Library courageously recited:

*What comes to your mind when we talk about refugees? Maybe it is conferences you attended, the work you did as a political representative or a Council of Europe staff member, but it could be also very interesting to meet directly the people whom you work for!*

*Have you ever had the chance to speak to a refugee or to the people working with refugees to find out what their life is like? Today is a good day to do so, as **the 20<sup>th</sup> June is the World Refugee Day and we celebrate this year the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention!***

*If you're ready to face your own prejudices and stereotypical judgements and meet "your stereotype" personally, you should become a reader of the Living Library where books speak!*

*For the anniversary of the World Refugee Day and the 60th anniversary of the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, **you are all invited to become readers of the Living Library!***

Nothing can explain better than these words the heart of the living library: a space for sharing, narrating one's own life story, listening, learning and possibly planting the seeds of more inclusive, open, tolerant attitudes.

In other words, the main objectives of the activity were:

- to raise the awareness regarding the stereotypes and prejudices that refugees and asylum-seekers face;
- to increase the visibility of the human rights education programme of the youth sector of the Council of Europe;
- to celebrate the World Refugee Day, by opening a space for dialogue about the main issues concerning refugees today, using a non-formal method (the living library);
- to further promote the awareness regarding access to human rights by refugees and asylum-seekers today in Europe.

It is important to add here that not all the Living Libraries are organised on the principle of putting together books with similar topics, or books that include in their descriptions similar prejudices or stereotypes. This is why this Living Library had to move forward bearing in mind at each step the risk of strengthening the same stereotypes it wanted to combat. However, the organisers estimate that the similarity in descriptions that the books had testify of a more general complexity of the situation refugees and asylum-seekers face in Europe today.



### **Who and whom for?**

The Living Library took a lot of human effort and involved many people, as follows:

- 18 refugees, asylum-seekers and professionals working with them, who have been involved in the activity as "books" in the living library
- 103 readers (many amongst them having 'read' not only one but several books), mainly Council of Europe staff members, parliamentarians of the Parliamentary Assembly, UNHCR staff, journalists etc.
- 12 staff members, who have acted as "librarians" and "dictionaries" during the activity
- 3 organisers, who most of the time during the activity took up different responsibilities and roles

So, what was there to borrow? It is impossible to summarise here the topics of the 18 books that joined the activity. Each book had a different life story, a unique one, even if the same prejudice that described it may have been also present in a different book... Some descriptions made references to prejudices linked to social rights (as family, employment, education, housing), others to more private issues that touched directly their human dignity.

An important aspect to mention in the way the Catalogue of books was organised is that in most of the books' titles organisers decide to mention the country where the book came from. This has had both positive as well as negative consequences. Some countries, given their recent past may bring about a higher attractiveness than others. However, inserting the country also gave the readers the possibility to discover a different perspective on a country's recent events than what they expected and to stimulate their mind to diversity and to question ready-made interpretations and images about other countries or cultures.

### **How did it work ?**

Each Living Library has rules, ours was not an exception.

The leaflet of the event informed potential readers that:

- *The Living Library is situated in the Palais of the Council of Europe, just outside the Hemicycle. If you are going out of a meeting, you cannot miss it!*
- *When you come for the first time, you will have to register as a reader to receive your Living Library Pass. By becoming a reader you accept the Living Library policy.*
- *From the library catalogue you can choose a book you would like to read.*
- *If the book you would like to borrow is in a language that you do not know, you can also borrow a dictionary to still be able to read it!*
- *You can spend some 20 minutes with the book you chose. Then you must bring the book back to the Living Library;*
- *The services of the Living Library are free of charge for registered readers.*
- *Only registered readers who have accepted the Library rules can borrow a book.*
- *Only one book can be borrowed at a time.*
- *The reader must return the book in the same mental and physical condition as when it was borrowed. It is forbidden to damage the book, tear out or bend pages, spill food or drink over the book or hurt his/her dignity in any other way. The reader is responsible for preserving the condition of the book.*
- *The reader accepts the fact that the book can quit the conversation if he/she feels that the reader treats him/her in an inappropriate manner or hurts his/her dignity.*

There are some specificities in the choices made about the *how* in this Living Library. Firstly, the time dedicated to a book loan was only 20 minutes, which made it sometimes difficult for librarians to get the books back on the shelves and also difficult for the books to make complexity simple in time. Several times the same book had to be lent twice to the same reader, or even three times!

Another specificity is that this library had a media policy, in as far as media representatives were present in the Council of Europe's main building during the activity. The books had the choice whether they wanted or not to speak to the media and



librarians had to be vigilant about this. This was just one of ways of protecting the integrity of the books and their privacy.

### **Looking back and learning**

It is not easy to say what impact an activity has when its main aim is to change or question attitudes and values. There is little or no determinism when it comes to this. However, from what the readers of the living library wrote in the golden book and from the evaluation the books and library personnel carried out, it is fair to say that the main result of this activity was to raise the awareness of readers and books regarding the stereotypes, prejudices and lack of access to human rights that refugees and asylum-seekers face daily in Europe. The activity did make a change. Readers appreciated the activity, especially because it provided a space for genuine dialogue with refugees, asylum-seekers and professionals working with them. Several Parliamentary Assembly members referred to this activity during other sessions and debates. This shows an increased awareness.

Another result was to increase the knowledge about the activities of the youth sector within the wider framework of the Council of Europe. Many participants in the activity appreciated that the method of the "living library" was very innovative and wanted to learn more about the ways in which in the youth sector activities are carried out on the topic of anti-discrimination, human rights and intercultural dialogue. A suggestion was to repeat the experience, possibly with an enriched library or on focusing on another theme.



The living library was also a forum where to voice several concerns affecting the situation of refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants generally today in Europe. Through direct meetings between policy-makers and the beneficiaries of these policies, a lot more information was shared about individual cases and problems. Even if the situation was contextualised and the refugees invited to the activity only represented their personal stories, participants in the activity expressed that they learn more information and more details about the main difficulties.

Last, but not least, the living library was a space for learning also about oneself (which was one feeling shared by the books and also by their readers). Several books explained in the evaluation meeting that there are still things they discussed as books during the living library that remained in their lives as questions, ideas or feelings.

The learning experience was not only for parliamentarians to learn about refugees, to put it simply, but also for the books to learn more about their readers and also address the stereotypes they might have had about politicians, policy-makers and civil servants.

### **And then? Is there a next time?**

A follow-up to this activity was requested by the participants themselves. Many parliamentarians participating in the activity requested that "living libraries" be organised in

their home countries and wanted to have more information about how to organise them. Thus, a possibility for follow-up is to use this opportunity to promote the Living Library to a wider public.

This report in itself aims at bringing to a wider audience the main outcomes, learning points, results and shortcomings that one may encounter in organising such an event.

For the future potential editions of the Living Library, some suggestions and recommendations could be extracted from the event, as follows:

- Organisers need to address the symbolic value of the promotional materials produced, for example avoid having red T-shirts, reminding of the colour of blood and aggressiveness.
- Organisers need to timely prepare the books and, particularly, have all the books trained together before the event, so that they all know each other.
- Organisers should make sure all the living library personnel (librarians, dictionaries etc.) are correctly introduced to the books and that their role is clear for the books.
- Organisers should keep in mind that the relation between making the living library attractive for a rather special target group (mostly parliamentarians or civil servants) and keeping to the principles of the living library is a very delicate one. The values underlining the living library should not be diminished in an effort to promote the library more .
- Books should be aware in advance of the fatigue that being borrowed in all time slots may imply. A thorough training session, of at least one day, should address this.
- Books' training should also address the sense of competition between the books being borrowed more often and those borrowed less often. Librarians should be trained to address this as well. The quality of the encounter should be stressed against the quantity.
- Organisers should ensure more time for each book loan. There was an emotional stretch of being read in a very short time and the frustration of not having the time to share more, expressed by some of the books.
- Organisers should timely decide how to address the risk that the outside public perceives the Library as a reifying human experience and reducing individuals to objects that can be borrowed, thus consumed.
- Organisers should ensure that the space for the books as well as for the books and their readers is confidential enough for such a delicate dialogue.
- Organisers should involve local organisations, whenever possible, also during the Living Library as such and not only during its preparation.
- Organisers should also train the books at the location and should address any question books may have about their readers.
- Organisers should define, as it was done this year, contact person with clear tasks and responsibilities. The success of the organisation of this living library relied on the fact the three partners divided tasks and shared progress in the organisation of the event.
- Organisers should tackle the risks of a "monothematic" library and put in place strategies to avoid too much uniformity in the books' descriptions. Whether or not to include the country of origin of the books in their description should be decided together with the books.

## Appendix 1 – Golden Book

The Golden Book method was used during the Living Library event to gather quotes and thoughts from the readers, the books, the librarians and dictionaries involved in the event. A golden notebook was available for all.

In the following lines we gathered the Golden Book quotes.

« A l'ensemble des partenaires qui ont organisé cette très symbolique "bibliothèque vivante", permettant de mesurer en direct les difficultés quotidiennes auxquelles sont confrontés les réfugiés. »

"What an excellent initiative !! The book I chose was French but with excellent understanding of English and in the space of twenty minutes I obtained a first hand account of what it is like to work in a refugee centre in Hagenau, outside of Strasbourg. We were able to discuss the background to the refugees, the routes that they take to reach Europe and the reasons for choosing Strasbourg as a destination. My overwhelming impression was that France is much more sympathetic and accommodating to refugees and deals with the situation far more compassionately than is portrayed in the media. Many thanks to book No. 10."

"Very useful initiative! To be confronted with individual experiences helps to change perspectives on refugee issues."

"It was the first time I could discuss with someone from Ingushetia and see how after almost two decades the experience of becoming a displaced person and then a refugee is still difficult even if accompanied by a great deal of confidence for the future. Informative, touching and much appreciated 20 minutes of someone else's life."

"Une très belle initiative qui donne toute sa dimension humaine à la situation des réfugiés et nous éloigne fort heureusement de la description de ce phénomène en termes de chiffres, de statistiques. Revenons à l'humain."

"Rencontre très impressionnante qui fait réfléchir..."

"J'étais particulièrement touché par l'image du caméléon que représente la personnalité multiple d'une personne qui est réfugiée et les difficultés qu'une personne qui était obligée de quitter son pays doit affronter dans un pays européen... Grand challenge d'intégration, grand effort de solidarité, rencontre humainement enrichissante !"

"La vie est faite de rencontres, toujours enrichissantes. Parler avec les autres, qu'ils soient réfugiés ou autres, c'est la beauté de ce travail. "



"Life seldom allows you to take the time to just listen to another person's story, partly because of refugees as a group often being far away from mainstream society, partly because we're too busy with all kinds of other things. Thanks to the living library I got to spend some time with an incredibly strong woman, reminding me of the importance to keep fighting for whatever you believe in, and making me wonder whether not most things are possible, after all. A

great inspiration to keep up the good work of the youth sector in the field of inclusion & human rights! ”

”A very helpful meeting – thank you for making it possible and keeping us well informed. ”

”It’s a great opportunity to meet people you wouldn’t have met, to learn and to experience beyond reading a newspaper. 20 minutes, however, is short! ”

”An original and wonderful idea to get to learn each other and to hear first hand about the situations the refugees left. Merci beaucoup.”

”Fascinating to find out more about Iraq and about different minorities, militias, and experiences of claiming asylum. Good luck in taking exams in October! ”

”A very humanistic and at the same time emotional meeting with a book. Thanks so much. Just great. ”

”An interesting project which could be repeated in various places. ”

”A very innovative and interesting chance to get a different input on things? ”

”If the Council of Europe have seen my best experience as senator, this opportunity have been my best experience in the Council of Europe. Thank you so much ! ”

”A very interesting initiative. Best wishes! ”

”Gracias por la experiencia de hablar con los refugiados y apartidas. Maravillosa y humana sensación...”

”J’étais bien impressionnée par l’histoire du livre 3. Les gens sont forts. Merci pour cette magnifique expérience ! ”

”Brilliant ! Thanks a lot. ”

”This was a very moving description of the difficulties of a refugee. Thank you very much. ”

”Excellente initiative, très instructif, très intéressant. A refaire ! Merci”

”Thanks for this wonderful initiative and thanks to the brave lady who shared her difficult story with me. ”

”Idée excellente. Mise en œuvre un peu critiquable. Résultat tout de même excellent. ”

”Je trouve que cette bibliothèque est une très bonne idée. Il faudrait plus de temps pour lire tous ces « livres ».”

”Fantastic idea ! I borrowed a wonderful book and was truly enlightened. Thanks for organizing this. ”

”Thank you very much for listening stories of your “books”. That was an amazing idea! ”

"Thank you very much for such experience! I think that this library is worth to be open to a wider society in order people would become more familiar with problems that refugees/immigrants faces. I hope that politicians are also involved into this initiative. Wish you to bring this library to as many places as possible! "

"I want to thank my "book" for opening her heart and her life story to me, for sharing her experiences, her concerns and her hopes. It was enriching and helpful and gave me food for thought!"

"Initiative très intéressante, à renouveler ! Merci à mon « livre » – irano suédois – livre n°18 qui est la preuve vivante que les préjugés sont nombreux et tenaces. Best wishes, bonne continuation."

"Un'iniziativa molto interessante. Peccato che sia durata solo 20 minuti : è stato troppo poco per leggere il nostro 'best seller'."

"This was an excellent initiative. I had a very interesting conversation, and learned a great deal "behind the scenes". We need to understand the human side of such situations."

"For the memory of this occasional meeting and how wonderful an experience it was. Hoping that it takes effects and that people start to realise that a refugee is someone who lost everything and has no place to go or to hide. Living in Europe gave us and evidence of humanity. Hoping also one day, there will be no refugees and people start respecting human rights and leave in peace."

"Je trouve que c'est une excellente initiative qui est très visible et qui permet de voir des gens concrets qui ont vécu ce problème. "

"I was recruited to act as a dictionary at the living library – a very interesting experience. I also borrowed two – in fact four - books, and their story moved me very much. This is certainly a good exercise to get rid of prejudices."

"Wonderful. It's like to enter in someone else's life, and have an insight perspective of such hard situation. And my book was really interesting, able to express her feelings and show her experience. Excellent initiative how to change our minds!"

"C'est un excellent concept! C'est la première fois que j'entends des témoignages dans le cadre d'un programme comme celui-ci. J'espère que ce concept va être confirmé!"



"Merci beaucoup pour cette expérience tellement unique et enrichissante qui j'espère continuera à se développer ! "

"Thank you for organising this. I had a really eye-opening discussion."

"C'est une initiative qui mérite d'être répétée. Vivement une réédition en Suisse !"

“Super idea, very tempted to take another book... but my book was an interesting story of courage and hope.”

“Je tiens à remercier tous les participants pour leur courage, leur histoire et leur patience. Ce fut un moment de bonheur et de plaisir d’entendre des grandes personnes partager leur passé. Je leur dis Bravo ! Et je vous encourage à continuer pour changer la situation de tous les réfugiés ! Merci”

“Merci de m’avoir donné la possibilité de rencontrer une personne si intéressante. ”

“A great pleasure to hear “from the horse’s mouth” about life for migrants and refugees here in Strasbourg, my home town – I learned a lot! Working, as I do, with much paper (documents, reports) and often with abstract concepts and theories, it was extremely interesting to connect this up with real lives, real stories and individual experiences. An excellent initiative, which I hope can be repeated for other domains!”

“I have spoken with an interesting book that apparently had difficulties to have readers because physically it did not seem that he could be discriminated against (he was Caucasian, blue-eyed but “blackhead” as foreigners are called in Sweden). It was really interesting to speak with him. I thought it was quite a good idea the living library and it would be a good idea to extend it to other fields/persons.”

“The living library is an excellent initiative. Too often, words on pages fail to impact in the manner of a photo or picture. The living library is a continuous photo/picture and so very powerful. Being able to question, with respect, the “book” creates the ultimate “interactive” medium and should be expanded into colleges and schools. Go n’envi an bother libh!”

“The living library is a great idea! I’m very grateful for the experience it gave me. You should do that more often, maybe also at schools or universities. All the best!”

“It is sometimes hard to hear the truth, but this time – harder than most. It really makes me appreciate what I have and am part of. Thank you for a wonderful initiative. I would love to borrow more books. Till next time.”

“Parole de livre: Merci à mes lecteurs pour leur curiosité... J’ai essayé d’être le plus fidèle possible à la réalité des ... de vie des mineurs étrangers isolés que j’accompagne – des jeunes du foyer Les Fougères, à 900 mètres d’ici, ambassadeurs d’espoir. Tānan vāga !”

“La librairie vivante est une très bonne idée et une très bonne expérience pour les lecteurs. On attend d’autres événements comme ça de la part du Conseil de l’Europe. Ça peut s’organiser peut-être dans d’autres grandes villes. Merci beaucoup et bonne continuation.”

“It is always better to listen to the people’s experience than just read. You can at least ask questions.”

“La bibliothèque vivante est pour moi une expérience inoubliable et à renouveler. C’est un contact direct



entre les décideurs (parlementaires) et les acteurs du terrain.”

“L’idée d’une bibliothèque vivante me paraît géniale. Le fait que les décideurs vont à la rencontre de la réalité des problèmes au lieu de toujours travailler avec les experts et les statistiques, permettra, je pense, d’orienter leurs décisions sur des portes plus utiles. L’expérience en tant que « livre vivant » fut très intéressante. J’avais l’impression que mes « lecteurs » s’intéressaient et n’étaient pas indifférents. Parfois ça ne m’a pas été facile d’aborder des points, mais le « truth telling » a toujours été un facteur important sur le chemin de la thérapie lorsqu’on a connu des souffrances morales. L’organisation était sympa, en plus !”

“The living library was a great experience that I had and learned a lot from my readers, despite the questions not easy to answer such as : “Will you call yourself a European or an African?” - I had to pause a bit and then the reader could continue to read the next page. As a book I was not damaged at all and it will be in the library until someone comes to borrow me again.”

“For my third and final book of the week I found out more about Rwanda and some of the history of the country. I understood better how being a refugee can follow you round like a cloak or even a dark shadow and even turn you into a double refugee! Many thanks to my book and all the books making up their rich library of humanity.”

“It was fascinating to hear the experiences of someone who works every day with asylum-seekers and refugees in desperate circumstances. I had not realised how many aspects of life could be problematic and how complicated it was to find lasting solutions. It was also very moving to hear about how people could change through the process of claiming asylum. It was enlightening to compare the experiences my ‘book’ described to what happens in my own country. I feel honored to have had this insight into such a valuable job.”

“L’entretien avec mon « livre » m’a profondément touché. J’ai eu l’occasion de connaître son pays l’an passé et notre rencontre m’a enrichi davantage. L’initiative mérite d’être renouvelée à la prochaine session.”

“The living library idea is a great one and could be – and should be – easily reproduced at local level all around the world that we may go back to a direct and personal way of hearing each others stories!”

“Notre mémoire est la boussole de notre vie et de la société que nous souhaitons bâtir. ”

”Une expérience très enrichissante pour les livres et pour les lecteurs qui a attiré tant de monde d’horizons divers. Je pense que cette expérience restera gravée dans leurs esprits. Merci à tous !”

“It was a fascinating experience to hear about the experiences of persons who have had to leave their country and start a new life, or who work with minors. I would like to have more opportunities like this!”

## **Appendix 2 – Address by Mr MEVLÜT ÇAVUŞOĞLU at the Opening Ceremony of the Living Library**

Deputy Secretary General,  
Commissioner for Human Rights,  
Chair of the Joint Council on Youth,  
Mayor of Strasbourg,  
Director UNHCR',  
Ambassadors,  
Dear 'Books', Dear friends,

I am very glad to welcome you all here, during the Assembly Session, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Geneva Refugee Convention and on International Refugee Day.

The Geneva Refugee Convention is as relevant today as it was 60 years ago. Looking at the events in the Arab world and at the waves of refugees and asylum seekers arriving at Europe's southern borders, Europe has not lost its vocation as a place where people fleeing conflicts and persecution seek protection.

Recent events, this year, however, have reminded us in a clear manner of the challenges not just Europe, but the rest of the world has to face when it comes to asylum. This year the Assembly has felt it necessary to remind Member States on several occasions of their obligations under the Geneva Convention and of the need for Europe to share responsibilities. Refugees and asylum-seekers fleeing conflicts, risking their lives to find a place of safety – Europe – need and deserve our help. But granting asylum is not simply a responsibility... Refugees enrich their host countries. Refugee integration is a long-term, two-way process. Both refugees and local communities need to adapt to each other.

Ultimately, integration means enabling individual refugees and the communities to which they belong, to take part, without discrimination, and contribute to the life of the host country. Thanks to the refugees or asylum seekers who are our living "books" in this library we will learn what this means in practice. I am grateful to all the 'books' for having accepted to take part in this experience: to share and dialogue with us, to confront the prejudices they have met, or still have to live with. I am certain that this is not an easy exercise and I am grateful for their openness and courage.

I am also convinced that this unique opportunity, offered to us Parliamentarians but also to Council of Europe staff members, Ambassadors and staff of the Permanent Representations, to establish a dialogue with refugees or asylum seekers will help, in an unconventional way, to learn something new and combat prejudices that we all have in ourselves and be more aware of the problems facing refugees.

Once again, I am glad for your participation today on this special occasion and I wish you all 'happy reading'!

### **Appendix 3 – Organisers**

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Youth Department of the Council of Europe

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*Strasbourg, November 2011*