



## **Declaration**

### **III Regional Congress of NGOs Of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe 5-7 December 2008, Penza, Russian Federation**

We, the representatives of European non-governmental organizations, have gathered in Penza to discuss topical issues of development of civil society in Europe.

We welcome the initiative of the Conference of INGOs to organise regularly regional NGO congresses because they offer a platform for NGOs from the region to address issues of common concern and to discuss possible solutions.

As a result of social engagement and activism thousands of organizations, hundreds of thousands of citizens of different nationalities, social groups and political views master the principles of cooperation, learn practical skills of personal involvement in social and political life. This is a unique community of people and organizations who show a sincere and selfless desire to support development in the society of our common values and active involvement in the life of society and state.

The ability of people to actively participate in decision making process, first of all, by means of civil associations and initiatives, reinforces respect for freedom of speech and association, cultural and political diversity which are universal values of today's world, as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights.

As a result of the open and broad discussions, we assert the need to reinforce cooperation and European unity based on common values, namely human rights, the rule of law, pluralist democracy, respect for cultural diversity and historical heritage. This task can be addressed only by means of active involvement of citizens in the life of society and political decision making.

We, the representatives of European NGOs bear equal responsibility for the development of regional and European cooperation in the face of global modern challenges.

We are determined to continue moving ahead in building Europe without dividing lines, based on the values of friendship and solidarity, freedom and peace.

We also welcome the decision of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe to develop the Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation, and offer our vision of this important document for the society. Further we welcome the initiative for a European Code for Civil Participation based on Council of Europe standards on status of NGOs.

We are convinced that these initiatives are serious milestones in the development of European society and democracy. They will promote development of dialogue and co-operation between civil society institutes and authorities. They are wholly consistent with Council of Europe endeavours to increase comprehension among cultures and religions and will lead to a greater mutual respect and understanding between countries and peoples.

We call upon the national governments to make full use of the role civil society can play in conflict prevention and post conflict situations by providing a bridge to dialogue and other confidence building measures for a lasting peace in Europe. In this respect we welcome the increased participation of NGOs in overcoming different post-conflict situations and encourage their further cooperation in this direction.

Participation and civil involvement of young people are crucial if we are to build more inclusive and prosperous societies and the Revised European Charter on the Participation of young people in local and regional life is an important tool to achieve these goals.

We appeal to the NGO representatives to reinforce civic action by strengthening interaction with

the media, taking into account the experience by civil society institutions and the Council of Europe.

We appeal to the representatives of the civil society in Europe and other relevant international institutions to promote the idea of civil involvement and construction of a more fair and sustainable world based on democratic values.