



interdiac

**Bratislava Declaration
on Diaconia and Social Exclusion
in the Central and Eastern European Region**

Summary

Bratislava 18.3.2010

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Introduction

The Bratislava declaration is **an invitation to join the process of developing responses to social exclusion in the region of Central and Eastern Europe and beyond and to work towards societies and economies where exclusion is no longer tolerated**. It is the result of a process of consultation and learning organised by interdiac and its partners in the region. The declaration was adopted by a meeting of fifty three representatives of members and partners of interdiac. It comes at a critical point, twenty years after the regional transformation process began and also during the year designated by the European Union for combating poverty and social exclusion. Furthermore, the impacts of the severe economic crisis are being felt with harsh consequences across the region.

The perspective of interdiac is that these changes have to be evaluated from a Christian point of view, which means to take a perspective from those Jesus called 'the least', those with least resources, least power and voice in decision making. Responding to this challenge will demand personal change as well as change in the way society is organised. Diaconia and Christian social action is committed to working with and on behalf of marginalised people and communities to overcome exclusion. Interdiac partners are committed to working with all of good will to achieve the changes so urgently needed.

Diaconia and Christian Social Action

Diaconia is an attitude to life which puts commitment to Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit into action. It works with and for those who are facing marginalisation in daily life to meet material and spiritual needs and it bases that work on the participation and empowerment of those it serves. The participants in Bratislava recognised that there is also a need for an ethically based change in personal life and the wider society and economy, which should be based on sharing, respect for diversity and participation. Respect for human dignity and human rights and care for creation demand also changes in political and economic priorities. Diaconia works with partners in civil society for changes to realise an economy and social system at the service of people and the whole earth. Interdiac works to realise these aims through training and research & development with its partners in the region.

Contextual Challenges to Diaconal Social Action

Diaconia faces the double challenge of dealing with growing problems of unemployment and social exclusion caused by structural changes but also with the long term challenge of changing the way those with disabilities or other longer term needs are treated in the social and health care systems. It strives to

provide quality services and also presses for systems which provide income and social security for marginalised people and groups. Diaconia works at the points where people and communities have been uprooted by war, civil conflict or environmental disasters, to build new community life.

The declaration calls for new responses to a range of specific challenges such as long unemployment, poverty and debt, homelessness, the needs for long term care, the problems caused by migration and returning migrants and the needs of uprooted people. Christian social action aims to build inclusive communities. Diaconia should also focus on work, employment and community economic development.

Future Strategic Directions for Diaconia and Christian Social Action

The participants recognised the need for Diaconia to be based on a more thorough analysis of the context because without careful analysis, short term actions often result in project failure, the waste of resources. Similarly, donor driven projects may neglect local needs and priorities. Diaconia, working with and on behalf of excluded people should:

- Work towards change at different levels from local to national to international.
- Create strategic working partnerships with civil society and create a political dialogue
- Develop and communicate the importance of its work in local, national and the wider context
- Work for changes in the society and economy as well as change in persons and communities.

Furthermore, a new values driven perspective on society and the economy is needed. On the basis of Christian values, participants were critical of the present economic growth model based on individualistic consumerism, which has led to increasing inequality. This has produced more poverty and exclusion. The values base of this economic model erodes family and community life which are the pillars on which a healthy society is built. These are also issue for Diaconia to address.

Implications for interdiac

Interdiac together with its members and partners will work out the implications of the consultation and invites other diaconal and civil society organisations, educational institutes and other relevant bodies to join in the follow up process through network building, training and support for strategic development as well as related research. Interdiac will launch new training and research initiatives with its partners to address the challenges raised in this declaration.



International Academy for Diaconia and Social Action, Central and Eastern Europe, o.p.s. (interdiac)

interdiac is a new Academy which is rooted in central and eastern Europe. With partners in ten countries in the region, we are developing new **learning programmes, research & development and networking** to meet the needs of diaconal and social action in the region.

interdiac vision is to promote high quality education and to support life-long learning in an international context. We also support specific research, development and exchange projects which will strengthen diaconia and social action in the region. The interdiac vision of learning starts with the learners' own motivation and is grounded in diaconal values. This diaconal focus means that interdiac emphasises:

- The safeguarding and promotion of the human dignity of each person, considering the client as the subject (not the object) of social, diaconal or community development work.
- Skills and strategies to support the participation and empowerment of excluded and marginalised people.
- The need to fight against social exclusion, work for a multicultural society and influence social change in a positive direction.

interdiac educational activities

- interdiac is building up a new international bachelor degree programme in diaconal social and community development work
- interdiac has already offered an innovative five month accredited study programme "Social Inclusion, Participation and Diaconia"
- interdiac is creating a programme of linked mobile seminars & workshops in the region

interdiac founders

- Slezská Diakonie, Czech Republic
- The Foundation of Helsinki Deaconess Institute, Finland

interdiac supporting partner

- Diaconia University of Applied Sciences, Finland



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