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| **BACKGROUND TO THE MARCH DECLARATION**  **AGREEMENT FOR PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE**  AIM  To achieve a joint declaration - based on, and established for, the Spanish situation - through which representatives of every significant sector of secular and religious thought in Spain would sign up to a minimum yet binding agreement that would guarantee the social sustainability of our country for future generations. It would reinforce the need for peaceful coexistence and stress the illegitimacy of any use of violence which tries to justify itself by any of the belief systems represented in the Declaration.  PROPOSAL  The presentation of the March Declaration on March 11th, 2006 was the beginning of a process aimed at bringing together individuals, institutions, public figures and firms interested in subscribing to the commitment outlined in the Declaration. Once a reasonable number of contacts had been made, a scheme of work was planned with the idea of informing people of its progress through a website.  However, this scheme was never drawn up due to a lack of experience within the team, so that the Declaration, despite its unique nature, is hardly known even in Spain.   RATIONALE FOR THE PROPOSAL  On March 11th, 2004, Spain suffered a huge terrorist attack. As well as the hundreds of human lives affected, various aspects of Spanish society went up in the explosion. Some of them were still only partially constructed, such as how to live in peace in a pluralist society, the integration of the immigrant population, and the development of freedom of speech and religious freedom. Two years later, far from finding a democratically strengthened society, it seemed that the reconstruction had barely started.  Over that year, through a project of dialogue and reflection called  *Reloj de Pensamiento* (Thinking Clock), an initiative supported by the working-group Lazarus Effect, a whole range of people gave over 6,700 hours to panels, discussions, drama, seminars, readings, inter-faith initiatives, etc in an unprecedented collective effort aimed at paying homage to the victims of terrorism, and at reflecting on the situation regarding social sustainability in Spain. Among the conclusions, these three stood out:  a) Given the complex history of the development of freedom of speech and religious freedom in Spain, and how the process of immigration in recent years has changed the profile of the country, we believed it was a key moment to achieve broad-based agreements that, because of their preventative ethical value, could offer direction to civic, social, political and educational action.   b) Greater dialogue is needed between religious and secular thought across the board, both through recognised social and political leaders, and the general public, in an attempt to establish some basic principles of a society in which everyone feels included socially, and free for the exercise of a constructive plurality.  c) It has to be the core beliefs of every religion which persuade its followers with their own arguments to respect their own lives, and those of others. They are the ones, first and foremost, who have the ability to address those who use such beliefs as justification for criminal acts. Theological thought in favour of peace needs to generated in, or brought into, Spain to counteract the spread in places of worship of religious beliefs that encourage violence.   These three conclusions led us to create a working agenda, the first result of which was the March Declaration. This itself was seen as the first step towards an agreement on basic ethical norms shared by secularists and the officially recognised religious groups in Spain (Muslims, Catholics, Jews, Protestants and Orthodox), that in turn might become a reference point for society at large to commit to.  In short, the distinctive features of the March Declaration, which differentiate it from others in Spain, are as follows:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | **WHAT WE ARE SEEKING** | **WHAT WE ARE *NOT* SEEKING** | | Establish parameters for a civic agreement on peaceful coexistence | Merely to hold a Conference or forum for discussion | | An agreement / commitment to social sustainability | An agreement on migration An agreement on inter-faith dialogue | | An agreement based on the Spanish situation | An international agreement (European or worldwide) | | Made by and for citizens of our country | An agreement with foreign representatives | | Leaders who are accredited by the government and their respective religious or secular groups | Led by representatives of peripheral thinking in their faith-groups | | A developing agreement | A definitive agreement | | Ethical and preventative Looking to the future | A normative agreement |   We have followed with interest the different initiatives and discussions that have taken place in Spain in recent years, and this has re-affirmed our view that the project must be driven by those of us who live and work in Spain. It must be genuine citizens of this country, people who understand the situation on the ground, with our own representatives and spokesmen, who move on from the merely reflexive phase of the initiative and who try and equip us with the resources we need to build a more harmonious society, whatever socio-political changes are required to transform it. Without ignoring the experiences in neighbouring countries, Spain must front up to its responsibility in the resolution of its own social issues.  **'WE WANT TO LIVE TOGETHER'**  **DECLARATION OF PEACEFUL COEXISTENCE**  **“March Declaration”**  PREAMBLE  March 11th, 2004 (the date of the Madrid train bombings) will be remembered by the current and by future generations as one of the worst expressions of the absurdity of terrorism, thepurpose of which was, among other things, to undermine the moral resistance of society at large. In response to this, the undersigned groups and individuals express their firm conviction that it is their civic duty to raise a voice in society, in commitment to the construction of social cooperation. They undertake to do this willingly and generously, with the hope that so much pain in history can be transformed into a project of coexistence based on pluralism and the highest mutual respect.  In honour of all those who have lost their lives, health or loved ones through violence and irrationality, who saw their personal plans and families wrecked, and of those who went before us in the search for an open, democratic and peaceful society; conscious of our rights, but now more than ever of our duty as citizens, we support the following declaration. We represent different religious and secular schools of thought but here our only aim is to achieve, as a point of reference for our country, a commitment to social and cultural harmony.  We invite all our fellow citizens to join with us in the belief that this will help towards increased understanding and peace, and the emphasis of universal ethical values, and contribute towards greater justice and the common good.  WE DECLARE:  1. We accept as our own the values enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Spanish Constitution which refer to the fundamental right of every human being to life, and to physical and moral security, as well as to the establishment of conditions under which the freedom and equality of the individual and of the groups of which he or she is part may truly exist, allowing the free development of personality and dignity, and solidarity among all human beings.  2. We express our energetic condemnation of violence in whatever form, whoever carries it out and wherever it occurs, including verbal excess, mutual recrimination, and hurtful or offensive language which in some way contributes towards or creates suspicion, discrimination or confrontation.  3. We declare our aim of building coexistence on the basis of civic respect, conscious that only a reconciled society can develop dialogue out of pluralism.  4. We choose to strengthen mutual trust, respect, transparency, courage and generosity in all our dealings.  5. We believe in the power of the word, and in the importance of, and need for, civic action as instruments to condemn and bring down any structure or thought which oppresses people, whatever their situation.  6. We propose more dialogue, consensus and meetings in order to strengthen the use of language of mutual respect, tolerance, consideration for the ideas of others, appreciation of life and the dignity of human beings.  7. We recognise the value of ethical demands drawn from diverse places, secular or religious, which respect the freedom of conscience, which seek to draw societies together and offer non-violent ways of constructing fairer communities.  8. We commit ourselves to developing an agreed ethical and civic code based on human values, criteria and basic attitudes which exist in the different religions and philosophies that co-exist in our society.  9. We declare that it is our will to contribute towards the resolution of conflicts in the fairest way possible, exercising self-control and the use of all our freedoms in an ethical way for the common good.  10. We commit ourselves to working together and within our respective communities to strengthen the conditions necessary for coexistence and to fulfil the basic aims of this pact, as well as to eradicate from our circles of influence all behaviour contrary to the principle herein expressed.  Being certain that we do not err in taking this step of unity within pluralism, we subscribe to this declaration and invite others to join this commitment to responsibility, coexistence and hope for a better future.  Signatories:  [www.pactodeconvivencia.org](http://www.pactodeconvivencia.org)  More than 500 signatures, inter alia, high representatives of major religious federations in Spain (Protestants, Jews, Muslims, Ortodox), Catholic personalities, and representatives of secular thought (academics, philosophers, etc.). |
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