

Religion and Diplomacy: The European Muslim League turns 12

K metro 0 - Milano - *It has been 12 years since the European Muslim League was formed and one of its founders, President Alfredo Maiolese, talked to Kmetro 0 about the growth, development and goals of EML. Here is an english translation taken from the original article published in Rome, Italy.*

Muslims in Europe face many challenges in the 21st century and, with this in mind, European Muslim League identified three major foundation stones from which to build, shape and prepare our new generation for the future.

Based on religion, diplomacy and the defence of human rights we will equip ourselves to deal with the challenges of working to protect the new generation from the dangers of radicalism and extremism.

Prevention, as always, is the best cure for any illness and drawing on our 12 years of experience, EML, under the leadership of President Alfredo Maiolese, has drawn up a strategy to combat extremism and those siren calls targeting our youth.

Education both within our communities and outside to our friends and neighbours is also important. We want to present Islam in its unvarnished form - a religion of peace and respect for all humanity.

"From our very foundation on 10th May 2010 this has been the goal of EML," said President Maiolese.

"EML was initially registered with the Italian government, the Ministry of Finance and later with the Swiss government in the Canton of Bern. Over time it has obtained wider recognition. On the 4th of January 2012 EML was awarded a place in the Transparency Register in the European Union, with the relative possibility of accessing the European Parliament.

"It was then entered in the register of the United Nations Social Affairs Council. Since then, EML has been invited to New York for the various assemblies held at the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations (ECOSOC), an institutional body that has the main competence on international economic, social, cultural and educational relations and issues.

"It is also no coincidence that in 2016 the Strasbourg-based Council of Europe described the EML as an expert in the prevention of radicalisation.

"The diversity of those behind EML reflects the diversity of Muslims in Europe," said President Maiolese, adding: "Some of our most effective mediators and strategists are converted Muslims who originated from secular backgrounds or from different faiths.

"The convert Muslims have a strong belief of what it means to be European," he explained. "Their perspective is enriched by the experience of other first and second generation Muslims who also bring a wealth of views and experiences to the EML table".

President Maiolese said the diversity of the board and its Peace Ambassadors was unique to EML: "Identities in Europe are no longer one dimensional as this is reflected among our own members who are confident and capable of promoting our faith to a wider audience.

"Our message and mission is clear: we want to bring clarity to often complex issues because people, understandably, confuse faith and culture," said President Maiolese.

During EML's formative years he reached out to promote a greater understanding between people of faith and no faith. This bridge-building exercise has resulted in strong interfaith bonds.

President Maiolese added: "Our philosophy of peace and tolerance has led to productive relationships with those of other beliefs. In particular our Christian and Jewish cousins, coming from the common belief of Adam and Eve and illustrated century after century by the shared prophets like Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus to Muhammad, the seal of the prophets leads to the single path towards peace, understanding and respect.

The balance of these twelve years is significant. First of all, Maiolese's ability to link religion and diplomacy has been recognized by ministers, ambassadors, parliamentarians and other European institutions.

Excellent relations also with officials and emissaries of His Holiness Pope Francis. On the operational side, however, it is worth noting the commitment of the Secretary General of the EML, Dr Yvonne Ridley, who has concentrated much of her energy on the development and progress of

Muslim women, especially those involved in areas of conflict and humanitarian disasters.

In 2018, for example, she worked with a team of South African lawyers in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh, creating an electronic legal catalogue documenting testimonies of war crimes committed on Rohingya Muslims living in refugee camps after fleeing for their lives from neighbouring Myanmar.

A few months later she was at the side of Nelson Mandela's granddaughter to highlight the plight of Syrian women prisoners of war and their children held in the regime's prisons.

She also visited Syria's so-called free zones to talk about human rights and highlight the needs of Syrian orphans. In 2019 she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, and she often speaks at international conferences on women's and human rights. Particular interest has also focussed on timely interventions for young Muslims who are often targeted by extremist and radical voices online.

Under the direction of Dr Enrico Gervasoni, a strategic adviser of the EML and consultant for international relations with the Holy See, a process has been launched that brings the EML back as a protagonist for peace and development in international relations.

He has activated EML's 'Cooperation with Peoples, States and Religions' (CPSR) project resulting in the advancement of interreligious dialogue by fully developing a diplomacy of action. This action centres around meetings, conferences and agreements with state, religious and academic institutions across Europe.

The rapid success and positive feedback encouraged EML to roll out a global initiative involving the establishment of a network of international peace ambassadors. This significant global footprint has resulted in invitations and meetings with various governments in the Middle East, Asia, Africa, America and Oceania.

EML currently boasts ambassadors of peace in more than 50 countries: from New Zealand to Indonesia, Malaysia, India, the Middle East, Africa, through to Latin America as well as across Europe.

"Our objectives are still many and our progress was halted by the unforeseen arrival of the pandemic but we have used our time during the lockdown periods to develop post covid strategies which we are sure will lead to an even greater commitment to restore confidence and hope," concluded President Maiolese.