

From Belgium to Bosnia, History Museums Unite to Define Europe's Future Identity

Sites of Conscience remembering diverse histories pledge to jointly address common issues such as migration and discrimination in Europe today

*** The media is invited to a public event on Thursday, November 3 at 9:30 a.m. at the European Commission's Directorate General for Communication.**

Brussels, Belgium, November 3, 2011 — Representatives from more than twenty Sites of Conscience, each remembering different aspects of European history - distant and recent - are coming together at the European Commission this week. Their goal: to shape new understanding of a changing Europe by tapping the rich histories of the continent. Organized by the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience and hosted by the European Commission's Directorate General for Communication, this gathering will bring together organizations as diverse as Terezín Memorial (Czech Republic) to the Srebrenica–Potočari Memorial Center (Bosnia and Herzegovina) to Le Bois du Cazier in Belgium. Together, this group aims to bring the voices of their 2.5 million annual visitors into the debates about immigration and discrimination evolving across Europe.

“Global migration is transforming Europe today. As each country addresses migration in different ways, how can we overcome difference and reconcile our visions for a united Europe? Well, perhaps answers for the future lie in looking at our pasts,” says Doudou Diène, former UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, and Chair of the Board of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, the worldwide network of historic sites and museums that activate the power of the past to create a more just future. “These Sites of Conscience are showing us how the powerful lessons of their histories can provide ways to overcome the rifts in our countries and our communities today.”

Elizabeth Silkes, Executive Director of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience, which launched this initiative, adds, “Through dynamic and engaging programs, Sites of Conscience take deliberate steps to help visitors connect past to present, memory to action. Now, by coming together, these Sites from across Europe are not only supporting the steps that each Site is taking on its own, but are collectively helping to shape a new vision for Europe.”

The European Sites of Conscience network includes 23 organizations remembering diverse histories but united in their common goal of promoting tolerance and combating discrimination in today's Europe. (See full list of network members below.) This network is one among eight regional and thematic Sites of Conscience networks of the International Coalition of Sites of Conscience. Each regional /thematic network consists of museums, memorials, memory initiatives and other organizations that use history to address a common contemporary theme.

*** The media is invited to a public event on Thursday, November 3, 9:30 – 11 a.m. at the European Commission's Directorate General for Communication, Tour Madou - Place Madou 1.**

Speakers include: **Doudou Diène**, former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, **Pavel Tychtl**, European Commission's Directorate General for Communication, and **Sites of Conscience representatives**.

RSVP REQUIRED FOR ENTRY. Please RSVP at sfemandez@sitesofconscience.org.

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Contact:

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Participating European Sites of Conscience:

1. Le Bois du Cazier (Belgium)
2. B92/Museum of Tolerance (Serbia)
3. Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities (Norway)
4. Discovery Center (Kosovo)
5. Diversity Challenges (United Kingdom)
6. Fundação Aristides de Sousa Mendes (Portugal)
7. Gernika Peace Museum Foundation (Spain)
8. Hadamar Memorial (Germany)
9. Healing Through Remembering (United Kingdom)
10. Historical Museum of the City of Krakow, Schindler's Factory (Poland)
11. Istituzione Musei del Mare Galata - Mu.MA (Italy)
12. International Forum of Solidarity – Emmaus BIH (Bosnia & Herzegovina)
13. Memorial Democràtic (Spain)
14. Museum of Free Derry (United Kingdom)
15. Museum of Romani Culture (Czech Republic)
16. Peace School Foundation of Monte Sole (Italy)
17. Red Star Line (Belgium)
18. Research & Documentation Center (Bosnia & Herzegovina)
19. Srebrenica – Potocari Memorial Center & Cemetery (Bosnia & Herzegovina)
20. Terezin Memorial (Czech Republic)
21. The Workhouse (United Kingdom)
22. World Solidarity Alliance – Franco Bettoli (Italy)
23. Youth Initiative for Human Rights (Bosnia & Herzegovina)

International Coalition of Sites of Conscience

The International Coalition of Sites of Conscience is the only worldwide network of “Sites of Conscience” - museums, memorials, historic sites, and memory initiatives dedicated to transforming places that remember the past into spaces that promote civic action. The Coalition recognizes that the power of sites of memory is not inherent; it must be harnessed as a deliberate tactic in the service of human rights and citizen engagement. Sites of Conscience, like the Lower East Side Tenement Museum in the United States, the Gulag Museum in Russia, and the District Six Museum in South Africa, foster public dialogue on social issues to build lasting cultures of tolerance and human rights. **This conscious effort to connect past to present and memory to action is the hallmark of the Sites of Conscience movement.** As a network of close to 280 Sites of Conscience in 47 countries, the Coalition engages tens of millions of people every year in using the lessons of history to take action on challenges to democracy and human rights today. www.sitesofconscience.org.

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