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Hauwa Ibrahim: interview with the European Inter-University Centre for Human Rights and Democratisation

During the [Venice School of Human Rights](#), 24 June - 2 July 2016, we met **Hauwa Ibrahim**, human rights lawyer who won the European Parliament's Sakharov Prize in 2005. After her Opening Lecture and the Roundtable discussion with **Manfred Nowak**, EIUC Secretary-General, **Andrew Anderson**, Deputy Director of Front Line, and **Ryszard Komenda**, Senior Advisor on Human Rights to the UN Country Team in the Russian Federation, we made some questions to Hauwa Ibrahim concerning the global challenges and debates around refugees, migrants and human rights.

There is a big discussion in EU about the differentiation between refugees and economic migrants, what do you think about this?

I think these are semantics. From my perspective, when you think about migrants they could be economic, because Europe needs them to fill some gaps, but when you think about refugees these are desperate looking for shelter and security from war situations. This can be the difference but the bottom line is that all of us at one point in life we are migrants or refugees, if not us, our great grand-parents. What is important is that everyone is treated with the dignity of a human person. You do not demonize a person before you even humanize him or her. So there is the need for us to humanize every person and give back dignity. Is it right to have too many people to take over our country? To take over our economy? This is a moral issue, on both sides of the sea. There is no solid answer to it, but I could see that Europe is also right and we could see from the vote in the UK that people are scared to death about people to which they are giving shelter and this is not acceptable. I believe that the main issue here is humanity and further than humanity, policies that could keep people away into their own comfortable spaces, they would not need to come here if they had peace in their own countries. We should give a big voice for peace in Syria, let us have no corruption in Nigeria so people

do not go to Switzerland to put all the country's money. Keep them in Nigeria so people could have decent jobs and no need to be an economic migrant here in Italy or in any other country of Europe. This is a big question that will have to be faced at different levels, but yes migration and refugees are an issue of our times.

How do you see the future of human rights? Are you pessimistic or optimistic about the future promotion of them around the world?

I am optimistic. If I look back to fifty years ago, before the declaration of human rights, and look forward about what is happening now, it is true that we made progresses. Humanity is dynamic and continuously changing, for example the entertainment and advertising industry is totally changing our mindsets. I think that human rights laws are making a lot of work but the basic challenge should be NGOs, community-based organisations, inter-governmental agencies. We should not think about human rights in terms of what can we gain from them, but in terms of what we can give to them.

You stressed the importance of dialogue during the [Venice School of Human Rights](#), do you think it would be possible to establish a positive and constructive dialogue between Islamic extremists and the Western world? And why?

Yes, without a doubt. You do not fight ideology and extremists with weapons. We cannot defeat them with drones, I think we can do more than that. We have to get other strategies and tactics. I think and I believe that there is another power other than ISIS or the other national superpowers, this is motherhood: every mother who gives birth to a child and breast feed him, for sure do not want to grow these kind of people. You mentioned one important word, dialogue: above all, for me dialogue is the way to go. There must be an end in killing because we understood in the last ten twenty years that the more you kill, the more you produce new violence. Especially terrorists, the more you kill them the more some new ones arrive. I think we should fill that gap and dialogue at different levels. I am not suggesting that if people wants to use violence they cannot do it, but I think we should create a different narrative and that narrative is dialogue.

Thank you