

The Edinburgh Declaration of International Mediators, May 2018

Kluwer Mediation Blog
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I write this in the aftermath of the really uplifting and wonderfully diverse conference which I had the privilege to host and chair recently in my home city, under the auspices of the International Academy of Mediators.

Nearly 120 mediators from over 20 countries attended and shared deep discussions about how we as mediators can look outward and work towards a "new enlightenment" in the tradition of the great Scottish Enlightenment of the 18th and early 19th centuries which made Edinburgh, for a time, the "Athens of the North".

There is much to report. However, I'll leave that to others and content myself with the news that nearly 100 mediators signed a declaration setting out what we believe in and commit to. No such document is ever perfect and it would be understandable for there to be a few reservations about some of the expressions used. But, overall, the **Declaration** received emphatic support at the conference.

Here is what we subscribed to in a **ceremony in the Scottish Parliament on Saturday 12 May**, following superb addresses emphasising the value of principled and interest-based negotiation delivered by world-renowned negotiation expert **William Ury** (who also signed the Declaration) and Scotland's First Minister, **Nicola Sturgeon**:

We believe that it is in the interests of our world as a whole and our own communities in particular that difficult issues are discussed with civility and dignity.

We believe that it is very important to find common ground and shared interests whenever possible and to enable and encourage people to work out difficult issues constructively and cooperatively.

We believe that finding common ground and shared interests requires meaningful and serious dialogue which requires significant commitment from all concerned.

We believe that understanding underlying values and addressing fundamental needs is usually necessary to generate long-term sustainable outcomes.

We believe that restoring decision-making and autonomy wherever possible to the people who are most affected in difficult situations lies at the heart of good problem-solving.

We believe that mediators have a unique role to play in helping to promote the principles we have set out above.

We believe that it is a privilege to act as mediators in a wide range of difficult situations in our countries, communities and the world as a whole.

We are committed to offering our services to help those in difficult situations in our countries and communities, and in the world as a whole, to deal with and resolve these for themselves in a constructive and cooperative way.

We are committed to doing all we can to maintain our independence and impartiality in those situations in which we are invited to act as mediators and to build trust in our work as mediators.

We acknowledge and accept that preserving our independence and impartiality in such situations may mean that any outcome reached may not accord with views or wishes we may hold as individuals.

We acknowledge that applying these ideas is a long-term, subtle and complex process which we need to approach with humility and that a range of outcomes is possible in the many different contexts and places in which we work.

We are committed to maintaining and raising professional standards through training, continuing development and sharing of best practice.

We recognise that it is important to exemplify the values that we seek to encourage and, in our work as mediators, we undertake to do our best, and to encourage others to do their best, to:

- show respect and courtesy towards all those who are engaged in difficult conversations, whatever views they hold;*
- enable others to express emotion where that may be necessary as part of any difficult conversation;*
- acknowledge that there are many differing, deeply held and valid points of view;*
- listen carefully to all points of view and seek fully to understand what concerns and motivates those with differing views;*
- use language carefully and avoid personal or other remarks which might cause unnecessary offence;*
- look for common ground whenever possible.*

The **Edinburgh Declaration** is a seminal document. I encourage all readers to take this document and use it locally in your own work and further afield. Articles in journals, blogs, adverts, adoption/endorsement by mediation and other organisations, translation into other languages, and inclusion on websites and in mediation agreements are among many suggestions made so far for its use.

It is ours to make the best of. Over to you!

(Please do contact me to discuss if I can be of any further assistance or you would like to know more.)