

During an international conference with experts who work with young people in contested societies.

The Basque president says that youth ask for solutions and to take part in decision making

In an international gathering with young people, the Lehendakari—Basque president—Juan José Ibarretxe has appointed that Basque youth demand from politicians that “we take risks, speak clearly and propose new ways, although there is always the risk of making mistakes”, as well as actively taking part with their decisions for conflict resolution and building the future of the Basque Country.

“We’ve got a lively youth, a youth that at the time of resolving our problems don’t want to hide. They don’t want to leave the seek for the solution of problems to politics and politicians and invite us for reflection like today we are all doing together”, he says.

President Ibarretxe has met the participants of the conference Youth Work In Contested Spaces (YWICS) that it’s being held over this week in the peace centre Baketik, in which almost a hundred of young people and experts who work with young people in situations of conflict are taking part. Places like Israel, Palestine, Armenia, the Isle of Bioko, Egypt, Colombia, Catalonia, Galicia, Northern Ireland and the Basque Country.

Democratic values

During his intervention the Lehendakari has appointed that “the obligation of politicians is to transmit democratic values to young people”. President Ibarretxe has said that “I have just proposed a way, an honest way that tries to look for solutions but there are people who are transmitting to the Basque youth and the whole society the idea that it is illegal to propose a negotiation process that ends in a consultation to the Basque society. Is this the contribution, in terms of democratic values, that we want to give to Basque youth?” the president has wondered, to then affirm that “it is not enough to elaborate brilliant theoretical treatments on democratic principles, but these democratic principles have to be put in practice”.

To speak clearly

Juan José Ibarretxe has also said that, from his experience with the Basque youth, he has reached the conclusion “that today it exists, within young people, a loud social shout to politicians: Speak out clearly!, we have enough of confusion and of living under a permanent debate that doesn’t bring solutions”.

Ibarretxe highlights that today Basque young people “reclaim that ETA to stop definitely, politicians to speak clearly and to take risks and propose solutions and youth to participate. Youth want to be asked, they want to decide and be part of the future of the Basque Country”.

In his reflection over values, the president has wondered what is the democratic value of the words of a political leader, referring to Jaime Mayor Oreja (Partido Popular) “when he says that during the franquist dictatorship, Basque people used to live very well, placidly and without problems”.

The lehendakari has thanked the suggestions from the nearly 100 people who take part in the international conference on youth and conflict organised by the Direction of Youth of the Basque Government and the NGO from Northern Ireland, Public Achievement, with the collaboration of Baketik. Juan José Ibarretxe has stood out the importance of learning from others’ experiences, although he has clearly stated that

“Basque youth are aware that we have to find our way for peace and decide our own future.”

The YWICS international conference was born in Northern Ireland in 2002, from the collaboration between the NGO Public Achievement, the Youth Council of Northern Ireland and the School of Community Work of the University of Ulster. Until now, there have been three editions of this seminar, all of them held in Northern Ireland. The fourth one is being held in the Basque Country for the first time.