



**MOC Schilderswijk**

Veel gezichten, één hart

*Many faces, one heart*

## **Working together in the multicultural Schilderswijk quarter – The Hague, Netherlands**

*Jan Eijken and Yassine Abarkane – webinar NICMCR 29 april 2024*

My name is Jan Eijken, Roman Catholic theologian and pastoral worker, one of the founders of the Multicultural Meeting Centre (Multicultureel Ontmoetingscentrum, MOC) in the Schilderswijk quarter, a multicultural area in The Hague (Den Haag). This centre is founded in 2007 by the Roman Catholic parish and is an open project for people of all races and religions, especially for those whose life is fragile by poverty, or who have problems to find their position in Dutch society. We give Dutch lessons for migrants and refugees, support people with financial problems, there are several muslim – christian women groups, we have yoga lessons and movement lessons for older people.

Another important goal is that people of different religions live together and work together in peace. We don't aim at dialogue debates about the differences of each others religion doctrines, but we are looking for the similarities. We emphasize the importance of cooperation in favour of the wellbeing of the people who ask for our support. I am inspired by pope Francis' encyclic "Fratelli Tutti", an appeal to work together with all people of good will. Therefore the MOC works together with the Internship House of Yassine Abarkane, the primary school, social work and sport facilities for children and youngsters. The positive effects are a rather peaceful area, where formerly were a lot of problems with criminality, muslims radicalism, tensions with the police, caused by feelings of lack of future and discrimination.

### **Video of Yassine.**

Jan: I am very grateful for the friendship and cooperation with Yassine. We discovered that our motivation for this work comes from our faith in God. Our team spirit is nourished by our spirituality. However Yassine is muslim and I am catholic, we feel that our faith in God brings us together. That gives a lot of inner power and inspiration, also to overcome problems and to cope with resistance or obstruction. When you believe in a project, start with it! Very important in a society of many conflicts and polarization.

Unfortunately the MOC project will close in september 2024, among other things by financial reasons. But I am very grateful for the work that we could do in the last 17 years. And I hope that we will find ways to continue.

Thank you very much for listening to us.

