



Associazione culturale “Giuseppe Dossetti: i Valori”
TUTELA E SVILUPPO DEI DIRITTI

HDIM.NGO/286/08
6 October 2008

Osservatorio per la Tolleranza e la Libertà Religiosa
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2008 – Session 10

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Religious discrimination is one of the last prejudices to receive governmental attention and offences against Christians are probably the last form of religious intolerance to become a public issue. We all acknowledge the efforts of the ODIHR and of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office to combat intolerance and discrimination against the members of religions in the OSCE area.

Even so there seems to be a tendency to play down intolerance toward Christians in West of Vienna, because of Christianity's position as the historically major religion. For this reason the ODIHR and CiO Personal Representatives efforts should focus more to fulfilling the existing commitments agreed upon by the 56 participating States and pay less attention to other concerns out the boundaries of the OSCE *acquis*, such as intolerance and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation on which there is not *consensus* and that is not matter of concern of the OSCE because not linked with the security and stability of the Region. Moreover, we should consider that, in some cases, demonstrations against homophobia become by themselves aggressive shows of intolerance against the Catholic Church where insults and hate speeches against the Church and Pope are shouted.

So intolerance and discrimination against Christians should not be underestimated. In particular, attention must be given to exclusion of religious moral views from debates over public policy. The attempt to exclude Christian believers from public discourse in democratic societies is a subtle trend, but one that needs to be watched. Not only does it deny Christian believers a rightful participation in politics, it can also easily slide into more overt discrimination or intolerance. Christian leaders of different Churches and religious communities often complain about this and the OSCE and its participating States should pay attention to this.

The OSCE and its participating States should reject the claim that a democratic and pluralistic society should relegate to the realm of private opinion its members' religious beliefs and the moral convictions which derive from faith. In the Bucharest Conference it was stressed that whenever religious communities express concerns regarding legal or administrative provisions or propose



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alternative initiatives, this should not be considered as a manifestation of intolerance by these groups, unless these groups – instead of proposing – cross a line and become coercive. Vice versa was noted that it would be intolerant to seek to prevent the member of these communities from acting consistently with their own moral convictions or denigrate them just because they propose different options.

At times in some OSCE participating States undue pressure is brought to bear upon those who work in Public Administration in contrast with their freedom to behave with dictates of their own conscience. Medical practitioners or secretaries have been sacked for refusing deal with an abortion on the ground of their conscientious objection. Marriage commissioners were instructed to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies or else resign their posts. In the United Kingdom a magistrate was forced to retire from the family courts panel because of his religious conviction that adoptive children ought not to be placed with homosexuals.

All religions – also the majority ones – should be protected from manipulation of their teachings and inaccurate or disrespectful presentation of their members and backgrounds. It is also necessary to guarantee that the media and the public discourse are respectful for religions, their teachings and symbols.

In the media and the public discourse there are episodes of disparagement of, or incitement against Christians. Christianity, especially the Papacy and the Christian moral teaching not rarely are ridiculed in the media and in the public discourse that are sometimes marked also by disinformation. There are TV programs or videos on YouTube that ridicule the Christian faith or show irreverent treatment of Christian symbols.

Hate crimes and hate speeches against majority religions cannot be considered less serious than those against minority religions because hate crimes and hate speeches are serious per se. Therefore the Observatory that I represent urges ODIHR to continue to monitor and report the recurring episodes of intolerance and discrimination against Christians, not only East by also West of Vienna.

My Observatory also urges the OSCE participating States to follow-up the Cordoba and Bucharest Conferences by convening in 2009 a Conference at appropriate level to examine in a balanced way anti-Semitism, Christianophobia, Islamophobia, intolerance and discrimination against members of others religions in the OSCE area, within the realm of existing commitments.

Finally the Observatory urges the OSCE participating States to adopt effective and tailor made commitments, particularly in the next Ministerial Council Decisions, to firmly combat discrimination and



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intolerance against Christians, especially in the field of education, in the media, in public discourse and in the fight against hate crimes.

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