



WEG DER VERSÖHNUNG

**WAY OF RECONCILIATION,
AUSTRIAN "ROUND TABLE"**

Initiative for Unity in the Body of Christ
Boltzmannngasse 9, A-1090 Vienna, Austria
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**Intervention and Recommendations of Barbara Vittucci
Member of the Forum for Civic Responsibility**

**2009 OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
28 September - 9 October 2009**

Working Session 12

**Current Challenges to the Balance of Freedom of Expression, Individual Human Rights and
a Secure and Tolerant Society**

Tuesday 6 October 2009

Mr. Moderator, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Regarding the interplay between the principles of Freedom of Expression on one hand and furthering a secure and tolerant society on the other, Prof. Ombretta Carulli, in her keynote speech to the Vienna OSCE/ODIHR Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in July of this year, emphasized that "*a right 'not to feel offended' should not be promoted*". She then continued, "*that - conversely - the freedom of expression should not be abused to vilify.*"

These are expressed goals of the OSCE/ODIHR: to be a diverse and free culture and live in security and tolerance; to further and encourage free speech, including heated debate, and still respect the dignity of the other and his/her right to diverging opinions and the expression of them. One reason for free speech is simply the Human Rights of the individual person. The other reason is something we have seen in history: where the right to free speech is suppressed, there, because of the growing injustices, tension develops as in a pressure-cooker and then the situation becomes a security risk for all.

In her introductory address for working session 9 on Human Rights Education Ms. Lynn Davies similarly emphasized that we should not seek to repress speech but rather to nurture a culture of "*positive conflict*" where respectful debate is encouraged.

Yet there is a growing trend in Europe and North America towards repressing debate on some topics. One topic where speech is being repressed is in the area of human sexuality, as can be enumerated in a multitude of recent cases, some of which are listed in the addendum of this document.

Recommendations to the OSCE and participating states

1) We therefore recommend to the OSCE and Participating States: that *diverse* standpoints on human sexuality, a subject that is key to the human person, must not be repressed from freedom of speech in the public forum. We recommend to the OSCE for

its consideration that this freedom be mentioned specifically in its texts referring to Freedom of Expression.

2) Freedom of Expression is a key civil right. We recommend that the OSCE and Participation States protect this right from an alleged right not to be “offended” or a “freedom from hearing criticism” or a freedom from “hurt feelings”. As is stated in paragraphs 96 and 97 of the 2008 Venice Commission Report of the European Commission for Democracy Through Law:

"Democratic societies should not be held hostage to excessive sensitivities of certain individuals.." and "the level of tolerance of these individuals and of anyone who would feel offended by legitimate exercise of the right to freedom of expression should be raised."

Protection from "feeling offended" would be impossible to legislate fairly for *all persons* who may feel offended in the OSCE area, and, in addition, it would be at the costly price of the freedom of speech.

3) Freedom of expression includes the mention of one's religious beliefs *on an equal level as other topics* in the public debate as well as in the work place.

4) At the OSCE Roundtable on Intolerance and Discrimination of Christians on March 4th in Vienna, negative stereotyping of Christians by media was mentioned as a particular problem. Legitimate debate should be heartily welcomed, but using catch phrases and evil-sounding stereotypes in order to "vilify" as Prof. Carulli negatively referred to, stops debate before it begins and slanders persons, denying them of their rights. We urge OSCE/ODIHR to work against these negative tendencies using their existing tools and measures.

Thank you for your attention.

Addendum:

Some current examples where Freedom of Speech is being repressed and where vilification is attempting to halt legitimate debate and pluralism:

Germany: Christival is Defamed by Government Agency

http://www.christianophobia.eu/index.php?id=240&tx_mininews_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=93&cHash=783370a3cd

Germany: Freedom of Speech Impeded / Anti-Christian Slogans on Posters

http://www.christianophobia.eu/index.php?id=240&tx_mininews_pi1%5BshowUid%5D=128&cHash=33e47be3a9

20,000-signature Petition to be handed to Queen, Prime Minister and House of Lords on Tuesday 7 July over Gagging of Free Speech on Biblical view of Sexual conduct.

<http://www.ccfon.org/view.php?id=781> <<http://www.ccfon.org/view.php?id=781>>

Police investigate Anglican Bishop because he said some homosexuals changed to heterosexuality

http://www.christian.org.uk/rel_liberties/cases/chester_bishop.htm

Member of the Scottish Parliament reports Catholic Archbishop of Glasgow to the

police for defending institution of marriage in a church service.

http://www.christian.org.uk/rel_liberties/cases/glasgow_archbishop.htm

Bishops fight for right to criticise homosexual lifestyle

<http://www.ccfon.org/view.php?id=745>

A retired Christian couple were subjected to an 80-minute interrogation by police after the couple made a polite complaint to their local council about its 'gay rights' policies, which included making pro-homosexual literature available in public buildings.

http://www.christian.org.uk/rel_liberties/cases/roberts.htm

video: http://www.christian.org.uk/rel_liberties/roberts_case/video/roberts_case.htm

Christian Union reported to the Police for handing out gospels

In 2004 the Christian Union of the University of Cambridge was reported to the police following its distribution of St John's gospel to students and hosting an evangelistic meeting where the Dean of Sydney Cathedral put forward "a traditional anthropological, ethical and biblical view on sexuality".

http://www.christian.org.uk/rel_liberties/cases/jensen.htm

Parish church vandalised because of its teaching on sexual morality. In 1999 an Anglican parish church in Newcastle upon Tyne was vandalised and extensively daubed with obscene graffiti because its vicar upheld traditional Christian beliefs on homosexuality.

http://www.christian.org.uk/rel_liberties/cases/jpc.htm