



Conference of European Churches • Conférence des Églises Européennes • Konferenz Europäischer Kirchen • Конференция Европейских Церквей

2009 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Freedom of Religion or Belief for All
Statement of the Conference of European Churches

Europe is becoming increasingly diverse religiously, ethnically and linguistically. There are many positive consequences of this, but there are also concerns that human relationships are under strain and human freedoms are being restricted. Problems include growing misunderstandings between religious communities, religious discrimination and violations of religious freedom. In a statement, “Called to One Hope in Christ”, adopted at the 13th Assembly of the Conference of European Churches (July 2009), churches in Europe responded to these problems by, among other things, committing themselves to:

- the equal dignity and worth of all human beings under God, and in consequence to their equal treatment in the laws of all countries;
- insist that all human beings and communities are everywhere entitled to hold, practice or change their religious beliefs without hindrance;
- put into practice the hospitality and the welcome of God in our relations with all people and communities, including those of other religions, both by welcoming them in love and by reaching out to them in friendship for the good of the world and to the glory of God;
- increase participation in interreligious dialogue;
- deepen our understanding of the concepts of human rights and religious freedom.

The Conference of European Churches, as a fellowship of some 125 churches from all over Europe from an Anglican, Old Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant background, is committed to actively pursue these commitments through its Church and Society Commission and in close cooperation with international political organisations, such as the OSCE. Besides advising its member churches on human rights issues and church-state relations, the Conference of European Churches is presently working on benchmarks for the rights of religious communities to exercise their religion. The commitments of the Vienna Concluding Document from 1989 (Art. 16) provide an important point of reference for this work. The Conference of European Churches is equally working on a Training Manual for churches and religious communities in order to strengthen the involvement of churches in the area of human rights.

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Recommendations to OSCE participating States

In this spirit, we want to also call upon the OSCE Participating States to put more emphasis on the implementation of human rights in general and the right to religious freedom for individuals as well as for religious communities, by

- fully implementing the OSCE commitments ensuring the protection of places of worship, holy sites and religious monuments. The situation in Northern Cyprus as well as in Kosovo is of special concern for us in this regard;
- implementing the OSCE commitments to protect freedoms for all religions, for all individuals and for religious communities, majority and minority communities alike;
- supporting the co-operation of the ODIHR with civil society as well as with other intergovernmental organisations, such as the newly established European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency;
- providing more resources to the ODIHR in order to enable it to provide more training programmes in the area of freedom of religion or belief .

Recommendations to OSCE field operations

The Conference of European Churches welcomes the work done by the OSCE/ODIHR Advisory Panel on Freedom of Religion or Belief in promoting freedom of religion or belief, in undertaking important studies and in providing legal expertise to Participating States. We, therefore, recommend to OSCE Participating States as well as to OSCE Field Operations to:

- mainstream the work on freedom of religion or belief within their work on the human rights' dimension;
- take full advantage of the expertise available from the ODIHR to assist in the implementation of participating States' human rights' dimension commitments on freedom of religion or belief.

The Conference of European Churches (CEC) is a fellowship of 125 Orthodox, Protestant, Anglican and Old Catholic Churches along with 43 associated organisations from all countries on the European continent. CEC was founded in 1959 and has offices in Geneva, Brussels and Strasbourg. Through its Church and Society Commission, based in Brussels and Strasbourg, CEC is relating to the political organisations such as the EU Institutions, the Council of Europe, The OSCE and the UN. The Working Group on Human Rights and Religious Freedom of the Church and Society Commission <http://www.cec-kek.org/content/human_rights.shtml> promotes study and action by the churches on questions of human rights and religious freedom, including the relationship between church and state.

