

Osservatorio per la Tolleranza e la Libertà Religiosa
“Giuseppe Dossetti”
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom

2017 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting – Working Session 9

Statement by Alessandra Abis
Analyst of the
“Giuseppe Dossetti” Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom
(Italy)

Education is one of the key ways to promote religious tolerance and non-discrimination since it addresses the roots of the phenomenon. Mingling with students belonging to different religions is in itself a great help to understand the unity of the humankind. Moreover, it is important that school teaches about different religions and permits to each student to manifest and tell her or his belief. Knowledge about the other’s religion can reduce harmful misunderstanding and stereotypes.

Educational programmes should be developed and strengthened in order to promote a better understanding and respect for different cultures, ethnicities and religions. The education to respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms is not less important, both for students at all level as well as for those attending military, police and public service schools.

Such a use of education in our societies, is a formidable tool in reducing tension among religious, cultural and political groups – tensions that time and time again have shown themselves to be potent triggers for violent conflict and instability within and between participating States. Furthermore, education that allows all groups to learn about and from one another is also vital in combating racism, xenophobia, intolerance, violent extremism and radicalisation.

When dealing with education of young generations, it should be also bear in mind that in accordance with the indivisibility, interdependence and interrelation of human dimension commitments, participating States should always respect the right of parents to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their own convictions when developing and performing these educational programmes.

In this regard it should be noted that such parental rights does not imply only the right of parents to choose their children schools other than those established by public authorities or the rights to establish and manage alternative educational institutions. It also requires States to ensure that teachings in public schools do not pursue an aim of indoctrination and avoid children from being forced to attend teachings that are not consistent with the convictions of their parents.

Our Observatory applauds the teaching materials to counter anti-Semitism and intolerance against Muslims and, in accordance with the common approach in addressing all forms of religious

intolerance and discrimination, urges the ODIHR to draft guidelines for educators on countering intolerance and discrimination against Christians.

Interreligious dialogue and dialogue between religious communities and participating States are other important means in order to promote greater tolerance, respect and understanding between believers of different communities and believers and non-believers, as well as to ensure the stability and security of our democratic societies. Let me remark that interreligious dialogue is properly speaking an internal matter of religious communities, which should be free to decide if and when start this dialogue as well as to decide with which communities and on which issues conduct it, while the dialogue between religious communities and governmental bodies has different premises and goals, since it is aimed to achieve a better understanding of the requirements or positions of religious communities.

In this respect participating States are called upon, on one hand, to create an atmosphere of tolerance and appreciation of religions and beliefs within which religious and belief communities can engage in full and fruitful dialogue and, on the other hand, to foster the participation of religious and belief communities in a constructive public discourse.

I would also underline the interrelation and interdependence of these forms of dialogue and the right of religious communities to be included in public dialogue and debate, even through the mass media, in accordance with the Principle 16 of Vienna 1989 Concluding Document and Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/13.