



Working Session 13: Tolerance and non-discrimination II

*As delivered by Robert Clarke
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Equality legislation must not be allowed to assume a constitutional significance that overrides all else no matter how longstanding. The OSCE region has made significant progress in the last ten years. Countless scientific advances, enhanced international co-operation and increased transparency in elections. I want to bring to your attention something that has moved backwards: and that is tolerance. To assess it, I would invite you to use the “saying the wrong thing” test. Ten years ago, you may be at pains to find an expression of opinion that it was “politically incorrect” or “wrong” to share. I bet you can, far more quickly, think of dozens that it would be wrong to say today - can we truly say that’s the mark of an advanced and sophisticated society? As one commentator put it:

“yesterday’s victims are today’s victors...But they have learned no lesson from their plight...they promote a one-sided tolerance, they act as if their rights now include this: to have no one disagree with them.”

Continuing down this path paints a bleak picture, the work that faith groups have carried on for centuries will disappear - charities, hospital, schools and orphanages. And if that sounds like hyperbole, the evidence is already there: 12 catholic adoptions agencies in the UK forced to close in the name of anti-discrimination, Christian business owners sued for operating businesses in accordance with their sincerely held beliefs and religious organizations thrown out of conference facilities. These are not the signs of a healthy society.

It cannot be right for people to live in fear of saying or doing “the wrong thing”. Diversity and tolerance run in two directions. Some claim that Christianity, or religion, isn’t being targeted here – rather, that they are simply seeking ‘neutrality’ in the public square. But eliminating all faith-based world views on the issues of our time is not neutral - it is just imposing a different world view of its own on us all.

Tolerance is a two way street and in order that my generation inherit a world in which people are free to hold beliefs, free to share them and free to live them out, **Alliance Defending Freedom strongly urges participating States to recognize the reneging utopia that ‘neutrality’ is and instead facilitate robust and truly inclusive debate on the issues of our time.**