



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2018

Working Session 6 – Statement by the Delegation of Canada, delivered by Ambassador Natasha Cayer, Permanent Representative of Canada to the OSCE Thursday, September 13, 2018

Moderator,

For this session, Canada offers three recommendations:

- 1) That OSCE participating states continue to advance freedom of religion or belief, both domestically and internationally, in an effort to ensure greater inclusion and respect for individuals and communities of all faiths and beliefs.
- 2) That the OSCE and ODIHR continue to mobilize respect for the right to freedom of religion or belief as a positive approach for strengthening social cohesion, reinforcing public trust, and reconciling respect for human rights as a means of promoting national security and enhancing public safety.
- 3) That OSCE participating States ensure that legislation pertaining to registration of religious organizations embraces and upholds the principles of Article 18 of the ICCPR, and that legislation is not used to interfere with, obstruct, or otherwise curtail the activities of religious communities.

Moderator,

In Canada, my government is committed to striving to ensure that everyone in our society is respected and included, and is committed to creating space for further discussion and learning on important issues related to freedom of religion or belief.

We are all the more concerned with the rise of new and resurgent forms of religious discrimination in the OSCE region – oft rooted in the misguided belief that diversity must be seen as a threat. According to the Pew Research Center, restrictions on religion have been on the rise in recent years with devastating effects on individuals and communities of all faiths, believers and non-believers. This can take the form of direct targeting of specific groups, such as is the case for so-called “non-traditional” religions in Russia, and the upswing in the cynical instrumentalization of fear of differences for populist political ends.

Preserving peace, stability, and democracy requires us to foster a social, political and legal culture which protects freedom of religion or belief, and respects the equal rights of all, regardless of differences in our beliefs. In the words of the UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Dr. Ahmed Shaheed: *“the enjoyment of the full exercise of the freedom of religion or belief also requires a set of positive policy measures – including in the areas of education, religious literacy, media, civil society development, and State cooperation with religious leaders and communities - to bring about a culture where pluralism and diversity is celebrated, rather than feared.”*