

Session 5

ENGLISH only

Cordoba OSCE-Conference on Anti-Semitism and other forms of Intolerance 8-9 June 2005.

Intervention on discrimination of all sorts of faith.

Mister chairman.

Ladies and gentlemen.

As a member of our conference already has remind us. This conference is not an academic seminar. We have the discrimination we talk about around us in most of our countries and we must act ! I will, as member of the OSCE\ODIHR Panel of Experts on freedom of Religion or Belief, make a short intervention on what I read is going on in the field of Religion and Belief.

Not even in my own country, Sweden, can we say that we have full freedom of religion and belief. We have had a reform which change very much of relation state and churches or other religious groups, but still is there a special law for Church of Sweden, a law which are accepted of a majority of this church decision making body, the assembly. But, besides of the law of Church of Sweden we have got a law which effect all religious churches or religious organizations, but still many thinks it is nessecery to have a specially law that regulate the former state church. This law is discriminating to all other Christian communities and to other faiths in Sweden.

But this fact is nothing to compare with what we hear every week is going on among many religious groups in other countries in the OSCE family.

Membership in OSCE is compulsory: our member states have the free choice whether to accept the politically binding Commitments we have written or not. The commitment to respect freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is clear. Many of this rules is from the start of CSCE 30 years ago, many came in the Vienna negotiations 1986/89 and all is documented in the Copenhagen Criteria, which also has been benchmark to the European Unions criteria of new members in the field of Human Rights.

In the Copenhagen document is stated among other things:

@Everyone will have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This includes freedom to change ones religion or belief, either alone or in community with others, in public or in private, through worship, teaching, practice and observance. The exercise of this rights may be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and are consistent with internal standards@.

Yet governments intolerance against religious believers, through denial of their rights to religious freedom – rights agreed of same governments – remains in many OSCE-countries.

Worst is the situation in Central Asia, in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In Sweden arrange the OSCE-network and one of their member organizations a seminar a month ago. A layer from Uzbekistan visited us and two refugees from Turkmenistan. All three reported that they had been arrested and been in jail for long time, 10 years for the layer according to the fact that he did not have the @right@ religion.

It is not longer than the ministerial conference in Maastricht in 2003 that OSCE in its decision 4 on Tolerance and non-discrimination affirmed the importance of freedom of religion and belief.

So what can we do ?

Expel a state is not the best way.

The OSCE\ODIHR Panel of experts on freedom of religion and belief has a new start with 55 members in the panel from most of our countries. In a new little book @Guidlines for review of legislation pertaining to Religion or Belif@ as all member states have got here in Cordoba in your boxes, is OSCE Commitments clearly described. On page 9 you can read about @Religious extremism@ and state security which often is said to be a reason for states to suppress legitimate religious expressions. Read it !

The basic Laws on Freedom of religion in most member states is often good but the implementation is worse.

It is good that all member states besides of Uzbekistan has come to this conference. **But must we not have many more small information conferences with open possibilities for NGOs to take part and speak,**

as is the possibilities in the yearly Implementing conferences in Warsaw. But if smaller and near the people with problems should give much more respect for the work OSCE does.

**I urge to you representative of governments to give your support to ODIHR to organize such open conferences in many states in Central Asia, in the Caucasus region and in the Balkans, where still is religious problem specific in Kosovo and where local NGOs, churches and religious organizations and groups can meets in there own countries and report to you and other represents of the OSCE in their own languages.**

Mr. chairman. Much is still to do even if OSCE now has grown from a child to a young fellow in the best of her or his years.

Urban Gibson

Member of the OSCE\ODIHR Panel of experts on Freedom of religion or Belief.