

OSCE 2018**Dr Carys Moseley, Christian Concern, UK.****Working session 7 Thursday 13th September 2018 Fundamental Freedoms I including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief****Freedom to tell the truth about being male or female is under threat**

Free speech is being undermined for not just Christians but for everybody by transgender rights activists demanding self-declaration of gender without medical checks. This is resulting in a situation where people are being forced to lie about whether a person is really male or female, thus conscience rights and freedom of speech are being violated.

- Schoolteacher sacked for calling a group of girls ‘girls’ in a maths class because one of them demanded to be called a boy.
- Doctor dismissed by the government’s Department for Work and Pensions for refusing to use people’s preferred pronouns when assessing them for benefits.

In July 2017 the UK government announced it would consult on changing the law to make changing legal gender easier. There was great public opposition to this given that so many of us explained to the government the sort of problems that would result as well as exposing those that already exist. In response the government postponed the consultation and only reopened it in July this year for England and Wales. Meanwhile the Scottish government held its own consultation, going as far as asking whether children under 18 and even 16 should be allowed legal gender recognition. We are glad that the consultation document for England and Wales says the UK government does not intend to lower the statutory age for gender recognition, probably because government officials took note of public opposition expressed to the Scottish government. However we remain vigilant as to any alternative ways for such a policy to be promoted, via the education system or activism in the courts.

Proposal to ban so-called ‘conversion therapies’

This July the UK government announced its intention to enact a complete ban on so-called ‘conversion therapies’ for unwanted same-sex attraction and transgender feelings. We are fighting this proposed ban in order to defend clients’ right to self-determination and the rights of counsellors and therapists to practice on grounds of freedom of thought, conscience and religion. We are aware of the body of empirical evidence supporting such therapy and want to see counsellors and therapists allowed proper accreditation and training, engaging their fundamental rights to freedom to receive and impart information.

As there is probably not enough time here to go through all the arguments against a ban, I refer you to our website where we have an article listing ‘Ten Good Reasons’ against it, engaging the European Convention on Human Rights. However here at the OSCE we wish to highlight one aspect namely the potential for therapy to be treated as hate speech.

In March this year the Home Office, which is responsible for crime and the Counter-Extremism Strategy and not for counselling and therapy, said for the first time that it was considering a ban. This means therapy would be criminalised as hate speech and even non-violent extremism.

We believe that the only way such a ban would be effective would be via the introduction of state surveillance of counsellors and therapists, justified by deeming such therapies to constitute hate speech or non-violent extremism. This would be unconscionable and have very serious negative effects on the entire field of counselling and therapy, on religious freedom, on marriage and relationships counselling and family therapy, higher education and independent educational activities.

We call on the OSCE member states to reject calls for banning so-called ‘conversion therapies’, and to reaffirm a clear and unwavering commitment to freedom of thought, conscience and religion in relation to people who want to leave behind LGBT attractions, self-image and identities, and for those counsellors and therapists who wish to work with them.