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## Recommendations to ODIHR, participating states and faith communities

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Just a few days ago there was a small explosion outside the Synagogue in Malmö, Sweden and a cobblestone was thrown through its window. Thankfully no-one was injured. It is encouraging that suspects were arrested. Whilst police have not formally established the motive of the attack, naturally our thoughts turn to anti-semitism. One can only assume that the Jewish population of Malmö must be experiencing renewed anxiety in the face of another hate crime.

Hate crimes are an important issue everywhere. Last year in Sweden there were over 5400 hate crimes. The vast majority were xenophobic or racist in nature. 12 % of hate crimes had religious motives whilst 16% were connected to sexual identity primarily homophobic crimes.

The dynamics and language of hate and discrimination towards each group have its own terrible particularities. None the less it is clear that we have a great deal in common. Hate crimes against one community almost always form part of a wider pattern of intolerance in society which demonises “the other” and in which the other has many faces – Jewish, Muslim, homosexual, Roma, Jehovah’s witness, African, evangelical Christian etc. Which groups are defined as the other and the degree and nature of violence varies between contexts.

It is important to recognise our particularities, but it is equally important to recognise our commonalities. Given this, the Swedish Mission Council considers that a broad approach to combatting hate and discrimination is the most relevant approach.

### Recommendation to ODIHR

We therefore encourage ODIHR to widen the approach currently being taken which effectively separates religious communities into three groups - Muslims, Jews and Christians and others. In recent years there have been several meetings where we have separately met to discuss our particularities. This approach has its relevance but it bears with it certain risks.

- We fail to see the interconnectedness of the issues being faced across religious divides
- Opportunities to network and find areas for cooperation across religious divides are lost
- We are not given opportunities to discover how the dynamics of our own belief communities might contribute to the problems faced by others.
- We risk creating fora that give inordinate space to those who seek rights for the followers of their own conviction whilst simultaneously advocating limitations on the rights of others.

### States responsibility

States have a responsibility to respect, protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief of all in their countries. Yet a significant number of OSCE states actively discriminate against certain belief communities, placing de jure and de facto restrictions on their freedom of religion or belief. State limitations on the freedom of religion or belief contribute to polarisation between communities and state discrimination legitimises violence and discrimination practiced by other groups in society.

### **Responsibilities of religious communities**

Religious communities also have responsibilities. All too often religious language is used to motivate fear of other religious communities or sexual minorities.

We need to act responsibly and work for rights for all. Let us be clear. If the state removes the rights of one group it removes the rights of all, because what we are left with is privileges that the state can remove at its leisure. However challenging we as faith communities may find the increasing religious and social diversity that characterizes our globalized world, we restrict rights and contribute to stereotyping at our peril.

As a Jewish representative in the Swedish inter-religious council has said “I get scared when I hear that there is widespread public opposition to the building of mosques. It may start with restrictions on Muslims but it will end up affecting us all.”

*2012-10-03 Katherine Cash*