

Freedom of religion and belief, judging by the recent activity on various OSCE fora, appear to be highly appreciated by the OSCE community, states and organizations alike. Attention has been paid not only to the discrimination against minority religions but also against mainstream, majority beliefs, such as Christianity. In this concern about the freedom of religion and belief, there is, however, a darker side. In many instances religion is used as an excuse to curb other rights and to discriminate other people. In the name of various beliefs the rights of women, children and sexual minorities are attacked and religious values are put forward as if giving freedom to discriminate other people.

We have heard claims of discrimination based on religion when some OSCE members have enacted and implemented laws that protect gays, lesbians and transpersons. Public officials have refused to serve gays: lesbians have been refused to give accommodation; equal marriage laws and antidiscrimination legislation are fiercely opposed. Belief is said to be an adequate reason to allow some persons to make an exception on equality, and not only by private persons but also by highly ranking officials of various religions.

I suppose that gays, lesbians and transpersons must just endure some hate speech and vilification by many religious leaders, but discrimination is intolerable. This kind of misuse of the freedom of religion will, in the long run, only undermine that freedom. Certainly it will hinder all cooperation for the promotion of human rights, including the right thought an conscience.

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