

OSCE - HDIM Meeting

Warsaw - 12th October 2007

Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

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It is a great and unusual privilege to address this auspicious meeting today in this great city of Warsaw.

It is unusual in that I am speaking as a priest of the Anglican Church, and doing so at the request of the International Gay and Lesbian Association. That itself must be a first for this or any other organisation.

But I do so willingly, as I consider the two themes of "Faith" and the "Lesbian and Gay Community" to be of great significance in the OSCE region today.

Both communities have a great deal to offer to the OSCE, and their work in defending the marginalised and voiceless has been a vital part of the life of the OSCE.

Historically, the Church has nurtured people who have defended the rights of the vulnerable - from Francisco de Victoria and Bartolome de las Casas who defended the rights of indigenous peoples in Central and South America following the injustices inflicted on them by the Church and Empire of the day - to John Locke, the deeply religious English philosopher and statesman who developed the theory of natural rights - namely that people have inalienable rights by virtue of being human, created in the image of God - a theory which was central to the development of the human rights movement.

In the last 60 years, the movement around the world in advocating the rights of people who identify themselves as lesbian or gay, bisexual or trans-gendered has gone from strength to strength, ensuring that people of such orientation should be able to live without fear of victimization and persecution.

And we must understand that the two groups - Faith Communities and Lesbian and Gay Communities are not mutually exclusive. There are people of faith who are lesbians and gay men, and there are people of deep faith and spirituality whose orientation is not heterosexual.

In a single word, I believe that the key word for the future has to be **Tolerance**. This may be one step short of full **Acceptance** which may be what LGBT groups may have as their ultimate goal, but within this political environment of the OSCE we are constrained to work within the restrictions of the Art of the Possible.

The rights of those with whom we disagree, and our rights with respect to those who disagree with us equally have to be respected and tolerated, Legislation will never make opposing groups agree with each other - nor should it attempt to do so. But legislation can and must protect the legitimate rights of all people in their life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness,

So, LGBT people from Moscow to Riga, from Vancouver to Vladivostock must have their rights respected and protected by law, just as Jews, Christians, and Muslims as well as other faith and religious communities must have their rights respected and protected by the same OSCE commitments.

But where these legitimate rights are abused and freedom of speech leads to hate-speech and incitement to acts of violence, and hate crimes based on the identity of an individual or group, those individuals and groups should have every right to expect the full protection of the governmental and legal authorities. And this must apply to those who identify themselves as lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and trans-gendered people as it already applies to those who identify themselves as members of a religious or faith community.

So let us all strive inexhaustibly to achieve this recognition by the participating states of the OSCE that hate-speech and hate crimes and any incitement to violence against people based on their sexual orientation or gender identity should forever be banished from our nations and that a new age of mutual respect in which diversity is celebrated and not repressed - may begin, and all people may enjoy the benefits of living their lives in the fullest abundance of peace.