



Statement as delivered by Herbert Bodenmann, representative of the Seventh-Day-Adventist Church to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), Warsaw, 7 October 2008

Working Session 12/13: Freedom of religion or belief

Thank you Mr Moderator,

I am the representative of the Seventh-Day-Adventist Church to the European Institutions.

Although our faith community represents more than 16 million members that have been baptised on personal conviction and although our Church has a presence in 209 countries, it still constitutes a religious minority that has been subject to restrictions and discrimination.

I would like to present to you briefly the position of the Adventist Church regarding

- Hate speech and laws regarding the defamation of religions
- Our understanding of religious freedom and the engagement for it

Hate speech and defamation of religions

At the 10th meeting of experts of the International Religious Liberty Association (IRLA), held in Romania this September, the international experts on human rights and religion voiced concerns over proposals to regulate free speech and establish defamation of religions laws.

The Adventist Church shares the view of these experts that no specific legislation should be voted but that hate speech should be limited according to the already existing human rights law.

We as a Church don't ask to be protected by laws that prohibit defamation of religions but fear instead the real cost for freedom of expression if such proposals were to be enacted.

We don't fear to be criticized by others but ask also the right to express and exchange our views in regards to other churches, believes or religions.

To be clear on this point: We renounce violence in all forms.

Religious Freedom

From its very inception 140 years ago, the Adventist Church felt the necessity to stand up for human rights such as freedom of thought, conscience, speech, belief, association and the freedom to change one's religion.

We claim the right of every person

- to choose religion or belief according to conscience and
- to practice and teach his or her religion or belief in full freedom, without discrimination, always respecting the equal rights of others

We also stand for the separation of State and Church as a precondition for the free choice of religion or belief.

In a few OSCE participating states Police has arrested in 2007 pastors, interrupted church services and harassed members of religious minorities, without any restraint from the government. In some of these countries being a member of a religious minority is close to committing a crime.

Our engagement for fundamental freedoms is the reason for the recently published *Religious Freedom World Report 2006 – 2007* that is available on our website.

(http://parl.gc.adventist.org/documents/world_reports/WorldReport2007.pdf)

Religious freedom is the most basic and essential of the fundamental rights of humankind.

We are not only denouncing all violations of religious freedom or beliefs we feel ourselves obligated to be respectful with those who hold views that are different from ours.

This is why we are against the initiative in Switzerland that wants to prohibit the construction of minarets.

The Adventist Church will continue to cooperate and network with others to defend the fundamental freedoms of all people, including those with whom we may disagree.

Thank you for your attention!