

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

6 October 2008: Tolerance and discrimination

Most groups which are commonly called “cults” or, in some European languages, “sects”, demand tolerance from others who do not share their beliefs, but they are not tolerant themselves. They claim to be “discriminated”, but they constantly discriminate their own adherents and people outside, and they widely lack tolerance as follows:

Missing tolerance against their own adherents, and discrimination within the group.

In such groups, whether or not they consider themselves as a religion, often only a single opinion may be expressed – the opinion of the leader which becomes the corporate view of the group which is “the only truth”. Only the group owns that truth while all people outside the group are “wrong” or even “mentally sick”. The ideology of the group does not only concern general principles, but often the very smallest details of daily life: how to dress, what to eat, what to read, see or hear, with whom to talk, what to do in case of illness, and of course: whom to marry. The creativity of the individual and his ability to make his own decisions will not have a chance to develop properly. This can have disastrous consequences if the individual is temporarily or permanently on his own: temporarily on some occasions, and permanently, after leaving the group and without its so called “protection”. This is then used to demonstrate “how dangerous it is to leave the group”. Also the right to seek, receive and impart information is often severely violated in such groups, with the argument “we must keep ourselves clean from the dirt of the world”. Thus, the individual cannot himself develop the ability to judge and to build up his own opinion. Families are often forced to disintegrate if not all the members of the family share the same opinion even in seemingly unimportant details. This behaviour is very similar to that of some totalitarian political systems which caused great problems in Europe in the last century. At that time too, as I well remember, it was strictly forbidden to listen to information sources outside the system.

Many such groups also reject democracy and intend to establish a “theocratic” system where self-appointed rulers make sure that the people follow the alleged “will of God”. Indeed, some of them have already created shadow “world governments” that are supposed to take over power at an appropriate moment. It is all a matter of power, not of religion.

It is obvious that such groups often violate human rights, especially the rights of children. Adults, one could argue, have chosen freely themselves – though in most cases unconsciously – to the deprivation of their human rights. For children, this is evidently not the case. May I remind you of the following rights of children, in the United Nations’ **Convention on the Rights of the Child**¹, which are often violated by such groups

- Article 12 states the right of children to express their own views.
- Article 13 outlines the right of freedom of expression including the freedom to seek, receive and impart information.
- Article 14 stresses the right of freedom of thought, conscience and religion.
- Article 16 recognizes the right of children to have a private life. Adolescence in particular is a period of testing limits, growing independent and searching for one's identity. This may involve new revelations, confusion and disappointment in oneself. Hence it is particularly important not to be on constant display - feeling x-rayed and unprotected.
- The most relevant article in this context is article 19, outlining children's right to be protected from physical and mental violence, and article 24, recognising the right of the child to treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health.
- In article 29, it is recognised that education shall prepare the child for a responsible life in a free society in a spirit of understanding, peace and tolerance.
- Article 31 reminds us that all children have the right to rest, to leisure and to play.

¹ Conventions on the Rights of the Child, <http://www.unhcr.ch/html/menu3/b/k2crc.htm>

The **Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union** ² also reaffirmed that the European Union stands for the indivisible and universal values of **human dignity** (Chap.I of the Charter), of **freedom** (Chap.II), **equality** (Chap.III) and **solidarity** (Chap.IV). In this charter, the following articles especially relate to the rights of children:

Article 24

The rights of the child

1. Children shall have the right to such protection and care as is necessary for their well-being. They may express their views freely. Such views shall be taken into consideration on matters which concern them in accordance with their age and maturity.
2. In all actions relating to children, whether taken by public authorities or private institutions, the child's best interests must be a primary consideration.
3. Every child shall have the right to maintain on a regular basis a personal relationship and direct contact with both his and her parents, unless that is contrary to his or her interests.

Many examples illustrate the fact that the rights of the child whose parent is a follower, himself maintained in an infantile relationship with a guru, are ridiculed by modern cults with regard to all three aspects specified in article 24.

Article 32

Prohibition of child labour and protection of young people at work

Remember that a well-known group even denies the existence of children at all: for them, they are adults in a small body!

Lack of tolerance against people outside the group, and discrimination: everyone not belonging to the group is considered as inferior or even as an enemy. By definition, any person outside their group cannot be a good person. The world is seen as black or white. They often argue that they alone are entitled to criticise everyone in the outside world but no one is entitled to criticise them. They often claim that in critical situations they were the only ones to give effective assistance. They claim that before their group was founded, the world was a dark chaos, and that they are the only ones who could prevent a catastrophic collapse. In particular they attack scientists and consider themselves as the only people able to expose the consequences of scientific activity. They even claim that the rules they have established within their own group must be made valid for everybody else. They claim that their own laws are above the laws of the State.

The CoE on 29 June 2007 adopted on Recommendation 1804: **State, religion, secularity and human rights**. Among others, it states that

18. Freedom of expression is one of the most important human rights, as the Assembly has repeatedly affirmed. In Recommendation 1510 (2006) ³ on freedom of expression and respect for religious beliefs it expresses the view that "freedom of expression as protected under Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights should not be further restricted to meet increasing sensitivities of certain religious groups".

19. While we have an acknowledged duty to respect others and must discourage gratuitous insults, **freedom of expression cannot, needless to say, be restricted** *) out of deference to certain dogmas or the beliefs of a particular religious community.

Articles 18 and 19 clearly say that religious beliefs may, though with respect, but also critically be discussed, and such a discussion may not be interpreted as "persecution" or "discrimination".

*) emphasized by the author.

² <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=TA&reference=P6-TA-2007-0573&language=EN&ring=A6-2007-0445>

³ <http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta06/ERES1510.htm>

In FECRIS, we do not actively try to motivate adherents of such groups to become “apostates”⁴. We care however, to help ex-followers who exist in great numbers, to re-integrate into normal society, which is a hard and long lasting work. We see the violation of human rights and the mental deformations caused to these people by denying them those rights, and we help to heal them. At the same time, we feel obliged to inform the public about our findings, in order to prevent others from falling as preys of the same trap. We do not care about these groups’ beliefs, but we care about what they do, or intend to do, should they become powerful enough one day. (Remember what Hitler wrote in “Mein Kampf” describing his plans, which unfortunately nobody took seriously!) It is well understandable that they shy the light of the day, and that they hate those who are able to expose their intentions. We defend free society in which we live, especially as its values are defined by international and European treaties and charters, against aggression from such groups. We do not “persecute minority religions” as they often accuse us of doing. It is up to them to change their behaviour and their intentions, so that we should no longer have reasons to criticise them.

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8828 characters – spaces included.

⁴ as these groups like to call ex-members