



Associazione culturale “**Giuseppe Dossetti: i Valori**”
TUTELA E SVILUPPO DEI DIRITTI

Osservatorio per la Tolleranza e la Libertà Religiosa
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom

HDIM.NGO/0143/13

25 September 2013

2013 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting – Working Session 4

Statement by Dr. Mattia F. Ferrero
Coordinator of the
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom
Associazione “Dossetti: i Valori”
(Italy)

A couple of years ago, the Report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe mentioned the possible clash between religious freedom and freedom of expression as a risk to the values of our democracies. The solution to such clash is still unresolved.

Freedom of religion or belief as such does not include the right for one’s religion or belief to be free from criticism or all adverse comment. But there is a big difference if a religion or belief is the target of critical analysis from a merely theological point of view or if there is an incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence against a religion or its members. Between these two extremes, one can find all sorts of expressions and there is no consensus about how and exactly where the frontiers of freedom of expression should be drawn.

If it is difficult to draw a legal limitation, anyway every person should be encouraged to exercise responsibly her or his freedom of expression, with due consideration for the believers’ feelings. In particular the media have the responsibility to give a fair and accurate account of religious beliefs and to ensure that members of religious communities are given the chance to express their own views. At this end, the ODIHR and the Representative on the Freedom of the Media may develop specific guidelines for voluntary professional standards and self-regulation of the media. In the same way, political institutions of the participating States are required to adopt code of conduct or ethics for elected representatives preventing intolerant discourse.

A special attention should be paid to the Internet (and especially to the social networks) that play a big role in spreading disparagement of, or incitement against religions and religious communities as well as in showing irreverent treatment or provocative portrayal of religious symbols. Internet service providers and social networking services should be encouraged to adopt standard form contracts providing termination clauses and penalties in case of intolerant conducts of people using their services.

All these measures will allow the public opinion to develop in a correct, mature way and it will foster a climate of mutual confidence and respect between religious communities as well as between believers and non-believers.