



Soteria International contribution to working session 14 Tolerance and non-discrimination II

I want to connect to our contribution this Monday, where the mutual mistrust between state and spiritual movements is considered a big obstacle to reach the transparency and dialogue called for by ODIHR in lawmaking and policymaking processes.

Soteria International wants to point out here that discrimination and hate crimes against spiritual practitioners in Europe and other OSCE participating states is the result of the same lacking recognition of the diverse spiritual movements within society.

Until recently all the OSCE participating states had a totalitarian paradigm in spiritual matters and the shift to a pluralistic and open spiritual society needs support.

Anyone who chose to live and practice spirituality in an unconventional form in Europe today, risks to be met with discrimination and intolerance, disregarding laws and conventions promoting tolerance and pluralism.

Soteria International has recently reported murder attempts against a spiritual leader living with asylum in Sweden. There are numerous well documented cases of hate crimes against spiritual practitioners, including physical assault on these Warsaw streets. Discrimination often take the form of being denied work or being asked to leave their job because of affiliation with a spiritual movement, as with yoga practitioners not being let to stay as police officers or judges in Romania. Many more have lost family and friends.

European citizens today chose to keep their spiritual practice hidden, not be outcast.

The disturbing reactions in society show that spiritual affiliation is a fundamental and sensitive question.

Intolerance and discrimination has a double prize, the first being paid by the individual whose fundamental rights are breached. The second is paid by society, being hindered in its natural development and growth.

The spiritual practice performed daily by millions of individuals is a genuine research and development of our inner nature. As for any research, isolation hinders both the development and beneficial use of the findings. The obvious financial benefits have led western medicine to open to different spiritual practices in fighting the increased diseases caused by stress, depression and unhealthy lifestyle.

The last days here have offered animated and frontal discussions regarding a possible dichotomy between Muslim traditions and European conventions. Representatives of both sides seemingly

welcome a clarification regarding which religious elements are essentially spiritual and which are essentially cultural, without spiritual necessity. An open spiritual society is a premise for longstanding success such in coming dialogues.

Today subversive or criminal elements sometimes attempt to hide under the guise of being a spiritual movement. In an open spiritual environment of authentic practitioners, such elements would immediately be exposed.

Europe has a history of successful transformation through combating intolerance and discrimination. Much has been achieved with regards to discriminations determined by racial group, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, age etc.

Time has come for increased promotion of tolerance and pluralism in spirituality and to fully live up to ODIHR's commitments. Ignorance and fear must be met with an open and qualified discussion on spirituality as a fundamental and sensitive factor in human life and identity.

Recommendations:

Soteria International recommends to the OSCE participating states

to investigate and counteract determining factors for discrimination against spiritual practitioners in their respective country, with regards to incitement from other spiritual or religious groups, media, political or other interests.

Soteria International recommends the OSCE ODIHR and the OSCE participating states

to further promote tolerance and pluralism in spirituality through education. Here best practice from combating other subjects of intolerance can be consulted.

Soteria International recommends the OSCE ODIHR, the OSCE participating states and relevant NGOs

to actively promote an open spiritual society, with research and results reaching the public and further to take responsible actions to harmonize the ongoing transition from a totalitarian to a pluralistic spiritual paradigm.