



Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF, FOSTERING MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING

2-3 July 2015

Hofburg, Vienna

ANNOTATED AGENDA

Background

Commitments to implement the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, and fostering mutual respect and understanding to assist implementation of the commitments are among the original tenets of the OSCE. The 1975 Helsinki Final Act states that “The participating States will respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion” and that “The participating States recognize the universal significance of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for which is an essential factor for the peace, justice and well-being necessary to ensure the development of friendly relations and co-operation among themselves as among all States.” The 1989 Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting, the 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting, the 1990 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, the 1994 Budapest Document, the 1999 Charter for European Security, recent Ministerial Council Decisions adopted in Porto (MC(10).DEC/6), Maastricht (MC.DEC/4/03), Sofia (MC.DEC/12/04), Ljubljana (MC.DEC/10/05), Brussels (MC.DEC/13/06), Madrid (MC.DEC/10/07), Helsinki (MC.DEC.6/08), Athens (MC.DEC/8/09 and MC.DEC/9/09), and Kyiv (MC.DEC/3/13), and Permanent Council Decisions Nos. 607, 621 and 633 have reiterated the importance of these commitments and their ongoing relevance to the OSCE’s comprehensive concept of security.

The right to freedom of religion or belief has been under increasing pressure in various parts of the OSCE area in recent years; growing instances of violations of freedom of religion or belief and related human rights such as freedom of assembly, association and expression as well as religious intolerance and discrimination continue to leave their mark on societies and threaten the long-term security of the region. At the same time, there has also been a considerable range of positive normative and institutional activities, policies and programmes focusing on freedom of religion or belief in the region, as well as unilateral and multilateral state initiatives which supplement these efforts and aim to protect this right and promote mutual respect and understanding. While this fundamental freedom has been receiving unprecedented levels of attention, such attention has often been in the context of the

enjoyment of other rights and freedoms. The right to freedom of religion or belief is still often regarded as a protection for the persecuted or repressed and not as a human right for everyone, irrespective of their beliefs, inseparable from other fundamental rights and freedom, such as expression and association, and therefore to be directly engaged with through a holistic international human rights framework. In that sense, it is necessary to emphasize the interdependence and interconnection between human rights. Furthermore, it is necessary to go beyond the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief in order to understand how mutual respect and understanding can be fostered in order to ensure human rights for all.

The current situation provides both a challenge and opportunity to develop a better understanding of what freedom of religion or belief as a universal human right actually entails in light of existing commitments and of the critical need to advance it in conjunction with efforts to foster mutual respect and understanding. This includes the understanding that the right to freedom of religion or belief belongs to all, including non-believers. Such conceptual clarity around the nature and scope of the right to freedom of religion or belief is necessary if OSCE participating States, working closely with international organizations, civil society organizations and religious and belief communities, are to construct a coherent, robust and transparent approach to further strengthen implementation of their commitments to this and related freedoms, including the prevention of violations.

It is therefore timely to bring together a variety of actors, including OSCE participating States, OSCE institutions and executive structures, as well as other international organizations, civil society organizations, representatives of religious and belief communities, and experts to a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting (SHDM) to discuss key current and emerging issues in the OSCE area in relation to freedom of religion or belief, fostering mutual respect and understanding, to exchange views on good practices, and to offer their recommendations.

DAY 1: THURSDAY, 2 JULY 2015

15:00-16:00 OPENING SESSION

Opening remarks:

Ambassador Vuk Žugić, Chairperson of the Permanent Council, Permanent Representative of Serbia to the OSCE

Mr. Michael Georg Link, Director, OSCE/ODIHR

Keynote Speech:

Dr Yevgeny Zhovtis, Chair of the Board, Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and the Rule of Law

16:00-18:00 SESSION 1: Freedom of Religion or Belief and fostering mutual respect and understanding in the OSCE area-opportunities and challenges
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Introducers:

Mr. Jakob Finci, Member of the Assembly of the Interreligious Council of Bosnia Herzegovina, former Ambassador of Bosnia Herzegovina to Switzerland

Dr Nazila Ghanea, Lecturer in International Human Rights Law, University of Oxford, member of the OSCE/ODIHR Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief

Moderator:

Ms. Katarzyna Jarosiewicz-Wargan, Head of Human Rights, OSCE/ODIHR

OSCE commitments remain key to efforts to shape responses to the current and emerging issues, trends and opportunities in relation to advancing freedom of religion or belief and fostering mutual respect and understanding in the increasingly pluralistic societies in the OSCE region. In the 1989 Concluding Document of the Vienna Meeting, participating States confirmed that they will “respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion” and, in order to ensure this, “will, inter alia, (...) foster a climate of mutual tolerance and respect between believers of different communities as well as between believers and **non-believers**”. The Kyiv Ministerial Decision 3/13 further reaffirmed “the commitments of participating States to respect, protect, and ensure the right of everyone to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief” and called on to “Fully implement OSCE commitments on the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief”.

Progress has been made in a number of important areas, for example, some States have adopted legislation that conforms more fully to OSCE commitments and international standards related to freedom of religion or belief. However, challenges related to the implementation of commitments remain. In this regard, restrictions on the right to freedom of religion or belief and related human rights applied by some participating States go beyond the limitations permitted by international human rights treaties and embedded in OSCE commitments. There are cases in which individuals and groups cannot freely study religion, assemble to worship, read and disseminate literature or establish charitable organizations, as well instances of individuals facing criminal charges for engaging in these activities. Discrimination and intolerance on the grounds of religion or belief continues to occur in parts of the OSCE region; such practices play a significant role in restricting religious or belief communities from exercising their rights fully and threaten internal and regional stability and security.

This session will examine the current practices and efforts to implement participating States’ commitments, as well as to reflect on the opportunities and challenges that exist in addressing gaps in the implementation of commitments. It will provide an opportunity to hear different perspectives on current and emerging issues, challenges and opportunities in the area of

freedom of religion or belief and fostering mutual respect and understanding in the OSCE region. This session will also aim to identify concrete policies and practical strategies that can be taken forward by participating States, religious or belief communities and other civil society actors to advance the right to freedom of religion or belief and foster mutual respect and understanding and the assistance that OSCE institutions and executive structures could provide to help accomplish this.

Questions for discussion

- How far have OSCE commitments in the area of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all, including non-believers, and fostering mutual respect and understanding been implemented?
- What are the opportunities and challenges facing the OSCE region in implementing the existing commitments?
- What approaches are working and/or not working?
- Where are the gaps in implementation and how can current efforts be further strengthened?
- What lessons can we learn from efforts to implement commitments in the area of freedom of religion or belief, fostering mutual respect and understanding?
- How can OSCE institutions and executive structures assist participating States in implementing their commitments?

DAY 2: FRIDAY, 3 JULY 2015

10:00-12:00 SESSION 2: Creating the conditions for meaningful and sustained interreligious dialogue in order to ensure stability and security in the OSCE region

Introducers:

Father Roman Bogdasarov, Head of the Secretariat of the Interreligious Council of Russia, Deputy Head of Church and Society Division of the Russian Orthodox Church

Dr Harriet Crabtree, Director of the Inter Faith Network for the United Kingdom

Moderator:

Ms. Anna-Katherine Deninger, Special Representative of the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office on Youth and Security (Vienna)

Various OSCE commitments have underscored the importance of dialogue between religious and belief communities for promoting religious freedom, non-discrimination, greater tolerance, mutual respect and understanding, essential pre-requisites for the creation of peaceful, stable and secure societies. The Maastricht Ministerial Decision 4/03 emphasized “the importance of a continued and strengthened interfaith and intercultural dialogue to promote greater tolerance, respect and understanding”, and the Kyiv Ministerial Decision 3/13 specifically called on participating States to “promote and facilitate open and transparent interfaith and interreligious dialogue and partnerships”.

While formal interreligious dialogue initiatives taking place at the level of religious leadership have been increasingly recognized in the OSCE region in their significance for the promotion of a culture of religious tolerance and a respect for diversity, challenges in creating the conditions for meaningful and sustained dialogue among and between religious and belief communities in the OSCE region remain. For example, reports indicate that in some parts of the OSCE region certain religious and belief communities, especially newer or smaller religious and non-religious belief groups, continue to find themselves excluded from State-promoted interreligious dialogue. A particularly worrying trend in many parts of the OSCE region is the noticeable lack of the equal participation of women and absence of youth in interreligious dialogue activities.

Although there is no single model for conducting successful interreligious dialogue, lessons learned from previous projects suggest that regular encounters between individuals and groups, if broad-based and conducted on equal footing and with a long-term perspective, foster greater levels of trust and understanding and tend to endure. Irrespective of the form or setting of the dialogue process, fruitful interreligious dialogue must be linked and related to human rights considerations and take place within an environment in which human rights of all are safeguarded. Only in this way can a beneficial long-term impact for such dialogues be achieved. The universalistic nature of the right to freedom of religion or belief requires that such dialogue be as inclusive as possible, including individuals, both women and men, and groups holding different religious and non-religious convictions. This has particular implications for State-sponsored dialogue initiatives given the duty of the State to respect, protect and facilitate the right to freedom of religion or belief without discrimination; in light of their potential to make a distinctive and important contribution to this process, the equal substantive and substantial participation of women and inclusion of youth should be a priority for the organizers of such dialogues in participating States.

This session will explore the indispensable contribution of the right to freedom of religion or belief to creating the conditions for meaningful and sustained interreligious dialogue, as well as those factors that are conducive to the long-term success of dialogue in promoting stability and security in society. Drawing on examples from the OSCE region, the active involvement of women and youth, who are often excluded from interreligious dialogue, will be highlighted. The participation of civil society actors outside formal religious communities and newer or smaller religious and non-religious belief communities will be considered. The role of the State in encouraging, promoting and facilitating interreligious dialogue will also be discussed.

Questions for discussion

- How can the implementation of the right to freedom of religion or belief assist interreligious dialogue and the promotion of mutual respect and understanding?
- What are the obstacles in the way of initiating and sustaining interreligious dialogue within a context where the human rights of all are not respected?
- What needs to change to remove such obstacles to fruitful dialogue?

- How can informal interreligious communication at the grassroots level, as a complement to interreligious dialogue activities of a formal nature, be more systematically fostered in the OSCE region?
- What practical initiatives can be taken to encourage and facilitate the equal participation of women and involvement of those, such as youth, members of newly-established or smaller religious communities and individuals from non-religious belief communities, who have been traditionally excluded from interreligious dialogue? What examples are there of such positive engagement and what impact has this had on the dialogue process?

12:00-14:00 Lunch break

14:00-16:00 SESSION 3: Advancing Freedom of Religion or Belief and fostering mutual respect and understanding through dialogue and cooperation among and between authorities, religious and belief communities and civil society

Introducers:

Mr. John Kinahan, Assistant Editor, Forum 18 News Service, Norway

Ms. Mine Yildirim, Head of Project, Freedom of Belief Initiative, Norwegian Helsinki Committee, Turkey

Moderator:

Ms. Azra Junuzovic, Deputy Head of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, OSCE/ODIHR

Given the multi-dimensional nature of the issues posed for participating States to implement their commitments to ensure the right to freedom of religion or belief, and foster mutual respect and understanding to assist this, multiple approaches are necessary to meet these related challenges. Human rights are, as participating States have agreed, the essential framework to all approaches, most notably in the area of law. Other approaches, including those of an educational and interreligious nature, are also necessary to assist this. Each of these approaches would benefit from a combination of actors working together to strategically combine legislation and diplomatic activity, a wide range of civil society and faith and belief-based initiatives, and research.

The 1990 Document of the Copenhagen Meeting stated that: “every participating State will promote a climate of mutual respect, understanding, co-operation and solidarity among all persons living on its territory, without distinction as to ethnic or national origin or religion, and will encourage the solution of problems through dialogue based on the principles of the rule of law.” Further, the Helsinki Ministerial Decision 6/08 recognized that “human rights are best respected in democratic societies, where decisions are taken with maximum transparency and broad participation. We support a pluralistic civil society and encourage

partnerships between different stakeholders in the promotion and protection of human rights.” However, facilitating open and transparent dialogue and cooperation among and between authorities, civil society, and religious and belief communities to advance freedom of religion or belief and foster mutual respect and understanding remains a challenge. While various forms of dialogue and cooperation among and between authorities, religious and belief communities and civil societies have been established to varying degrees, this work is often poorly coordinated and not always focused on the implementation of the full range of human dimension commitments entered into by participating States. This has led to the exclusion of some religious and belief communities and the perception that initiatives have not been utilized to their fullest extent.

Efforts to advance freedom of religion or belief and foster mutual respect and understanding should engage religious and belief communities. Together with relevant civil society organizations, they have important knowledge about the state of the right to freedom of religion or belief in their areas in which they operate. This speaks to the importance of establishing effective channels of communication between governments, religious and belief communities, and civil society. It also points to the great potential of multi-religious approaches, whether in the form of interreligious dialogue or other activities designed to enhance cooperation, to assist participating States to implement their commitments to advance the right to freedom of religion or belief and foster mutual respect and understanding. Building dynamic and strong collaborative networks with relevant specialised organizations and institutions and developing knowledge and basic expertise in the right to freedom of religion or belief among religious and belief communities, including non-believers, is necessary to translate multi-faith potential into effective and sustainable multi-faith action.

This session will explore how authorities in participating States, religious and belief communities, and civil society organizations can work together to implement their commitments on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of religion or belief for all, including non-believers, and the fostering of mutual respect and understanding in the OSCE region. It will highlight examples of dialogue and cooperation among and between these actors and will specifically explore the role and various possibilities of interreligious dialogue as a means to advance the right to freedom of religion or belief for all.

Questions for discussion

- How can authorities, religious and belief communities and civil society work together to creatively facilitate the implementation by participating States of their commitments to advance the right to freedom of religion and belief for all, including non-believers, and foster mutual understanding and respect?
- What specific forms of dialogue and cooperation among and between authorities, religious and belief communities and civil society exist in the OSCE region?
- What challenges are there in facilitating an open and transparent dialogue and cooperation among and between participating States, OSCE institutions and civil society, including religious and belief communities, on the implementation of

participating States' commitments on the right to freedom of religion or belief, fostering mutual respect and understanding? How can obstacles in this regard be overcome?

- What examples of good practices are there of interreligious dialogue that have fostered an environment of freedom of religion or belief for all, mutual respect and understanding?

16:00-16:30 Break

16:30 -17:30 CLOSING SESSION

Reports by the Moderators of the Working Sessions
Comments from the floor

Closing remarks:

Mr. Michael Georg Link, Director, OSCE/ODIHR

17:30 Closing of the meeting