

Delegation of Italy

**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF ITALY AT THE
OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

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**Plenary session I: Combating intolerance and discrimination
against Muslims**

In the Italian legal system, religious freedom is protected by constitutional provisions. The Constitution states that all persons – citizens, foreign nationals and stateless persons – have “the right to profess feely their own religious faith in whatever form, individually or in association, to propagate it and to worship in private or in public, provided that the rites are not contrary to public morality”.

Religion as a factor promoting integration

Religion and its practice are vehicles for promoting integration, and for that reason among others the study of the religious phenomenon is of particular interest. This is the concern of the “Observatory on Religious Policies”, an institution attached to the Ministry of the Interior responsible for religious questions. The Observatory monitors phenomena related to religious freedom and its practical application. In addition to its research activities, it also explores aspects of the religious phenomenon with a particular social impact and seeks to develop databases favouring integration.

In 2009, the Observatory undertook a study on initiatives aimed at interreligious and cultural dialogue that have been organized in Italy, with contributions from institutions and private individuals.

These initiatives include the various experiments covered by the general term “religious round tables” initiated by various local administrations, at which representatives of the various religions can draw attention to their difficulties, discuss subjects of common interest and seek appropriate solutions to problems encountered.

A true institutional role is played by the Territorial Councils for Immigration, which have proved a reliable aid in the development of systems for the local “governance” of the immigration phenomenon, and which sometimes take up religious problems, closely connected with the immigration issue.

Apart from local initiatives, mention should be made at the national level of the Charter on the Values of Citizenship and Integration and of the Committee on Islam.

The Charter on the Values of Citizenship and Integration, a document of major importance setting forth the rights, but also the duties, of immigrants in Italy, which has been in force since 2007, aims to promote interreligious and intercultural dialogue in order to promote respect for human dignity and contribute towards combating prejudices and intolerance. Those contributing to the drafting of this Charter included representatives of the Islamic confession.

The Committee on Islam was set up in February 2010 by the Minister of the Interior to develop ways of obtaining a clearer picture of the phenomenon of the Islamic presence in Italy and promote the integration of the immigrants into Italian society. The Committee is a collective organ composed of teachers of Islamic law or coming from Islamic countries, teachers of ecclesiastical law, authoritative journalists and writers who are experts in the area, as well as representatives of Islamic organizations and communities in Italy. The Committee also has the task of promoting knowledge among imams of Italian legal regulations, and in particular of the laws concerning the construction and operation of mosques, the use of religious garments and symbols and the provisions regarding mixed marriages.

The Constitutional Court has ruled that there cannot be any diversity of treatment between religious confessions, whether or not they have entered into bilateral agreements with the Italian State. However, the exercise of the right to freedom of worship must respect the provisions of Italian law protecting other equally basic rights of the individual and of society.

Another subject to which Italy attaches great importance in relation to Islam is the question of education.

An initial step to tackle the problem was taken by the Ministry of the Interior with the implementation, in co-operation with certain Italian universities, of an educational project entitled "New religious presences in Italy – a process of integration" and aimed, during the first year, at leaders of the Islamic religious communities.

The course, which began on 29 May 2010, deals with the operational aspects of religious freedom (places of worship, legal recognition of confessional bodies, ministers of worship). Consideration will then be given to the main historical and political problems that have contributed towards determining the attitudes of the Italian State to the religious phenomenon, the contemporary social dynamics affecting the State, the collective bodies operating therein, including religious bodies, and the relationship between religion and democracy in contemporary society. The project starts out from the assumption that religious freedom plays an important role in the integration of individuals and groups and that, in the synergy between universities, the public administration and religious communities, potentially helpful approaches can be identified.