

OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

OSCE Review Conference
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Working Session HDF1, October 7, 15:00 - 18:00
"Freedom of Expression & Media"

This is an intervention, presented by Barbara Vittucci, on behalf of the **Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians**, an organization, which monitors and documents such cases in Europe. (www.IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu).

Following is a brief report on the results of this documentation, as one contribution to an OSCE region tolerant of *all* persons, a tolerance that rests on the backbone of freedom of speech. We are increasingly concerned about freedom of expression, as we are receiving many reports indicating the extent of its violations.

In the field of freedom of expression, we notice a three-fold threat:

1. Negative Stereotyping of Christians in the Media

Prejudices against Christians are often being reinforced by mass media: Christians are being portrayed as being ridiculous; as being anti-scientific or irrational. The overly proportional media coverage of problems within Christian communities have lead, for instance, to individuals suing Catholic leaders in Austria „on grounds of membership in a criminal organization“. In the European Parliament MEPs compared the Catholic Church to the Sicilian Mafia, an organization to blame for innumerable suffering and the loss of countless lives.

2. Public Freedom of Expression of Christians obstructed by Harassment and Violence and other disturbances, making it impossible to speak

We have recorded several incidents of peaceful assemblies of Christians, which were protested against in a way that conveying a message was made impossible by shouting, blocking of doors, etc. To pick out two examples among many: In the Netherlands, homosexual activists disrupted Catholic religious services in February 2010. In October 2009 in Berlin, a peaceful pro-life-assembly was disrupted by about 400 activists, violently destroying the crosses that were being carried, partly by throwing them into the Spree river, which runs through Berlin. Whereas debate and expressing disagreement belongs to free speech, impairing the free speech of others and resorting to violence does not.

3. Effects of so called Hate Speech Legislation

Prof. Ombretta Carulli, in her keynote speech to the Vienna OSCE/ODIHR Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of Religion or Belief in July 2009, emphasized that "*a right 'not to feel offended' should not be promoted*". It seems however, that hate speech legislation sometimes does exactly that, especially when it criminalizes expression of Christian principles with regards to morals. Allow me to recall to you that in the UK, and this is just an example, several street preachers were arrested for saying that the bible says that homosexuality is a sin. Please mind that this is not about instigating violence but targets the mere statement of disapproval.

We recommend to participating States:

- **To recognize and condemn** intolerance and discrimination against Christians and **ensure** the right of Christians to participate fully in public life.
- To **take measures** against the rising intolerance and discrimination against Christians **in the media**.
- To avoid legislation which would hinder freedom of speech or cause partialities.

We recommend to OSCE/ODIHR, and OSCE Missions:

- **To use all their means to work against intolerance against Christians, as it was agreed on at the Roundtable on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians held in Vienna on March 4th, 2009**
- **To monitor legislation**, with special attention to so called hate-speech legislation, its content, interpretation and application; that such legislation neither impair free speech, debate or disagreement, nor exercise partiality to special interest groups at the expense of others.
- To use all available OSCE means to work against intolerance against Christians, inter alia **by encouraging the media not to spread prejudices against Christians, and by working more closely with representatives of Christian churches**.

We ask Mr. Mario Mauro, the representative on discrimination, including a focus on discrimination against Christians and members of other religions, to **be consistent with the fact that discrimination against Christians is part of the core issues of his mandate**.

Recommendation for the OSCE Summit in Kazakhstan in December 2010:

- **To make freedom of expression, especially with a view towards Christian communities, a key focus**.