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## "Freedom of Expression & Media"

### OSCE Review Conference and Summit, Astana Kazakhstan 2010

Statement prepared for:

- Civil Society Forum 26. November Astana 2010
- Review Conference 26. - 28. November Astana 2010
- OSCE Summit 1. - 2. December Astana 2010

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**This intervention and the concluding recommendations to the OSCE and to Participating States on the subject of Freedom of Expression & Media arise from the need to implement OSCE commitments in this area** in the light of current cases of repression and discrimination in this area, specifically against Christians in Europe, as documented by the *Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians*, [www.IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu](http://www.IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu)):

We seek 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. This is also a problem when Christian views are expressed in the Media"

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 three 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 Berlin's Spree River.
- During the Christian youth Conference "Christival", in Bremen in 2008 young Christians were violently attacked because they declared their desire to live out their sexuality in accordance with the Word of God.

**Whereas debate and expressing disagreement *belongs to free speech, impairing the free speech of others and resorting to violence does not.***

### **3. Repression of Freedom of Expression by so called Hate Speech Legislation:**

*"A right 'not to feel offended' should not be promoted" was emphasized in the keynote speech of the OSCE/ODIHR Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting in Vienna 2009 by Prof. Ombretta Carulli. It seems however, that hate speech legislation sometimes does exactly that, especially when it criminalizes expression of Christian principles with regards to morals. Examples of criminalizing expression of Christian principles with regards to morals have been occurring in the UK where several street preachers were recently arrested for saying that the Bible says that homosexuality is a sin. These were not cases of instigating violence. Arrests were made because of mere statement of disapproval. Here we can be reminded of the key principle of Freedom of Expression, as often ascribed to Voltaire: "I disagree with what you say but will defend to the death your right to say it."*

#### **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 4<sup>th</sup>, 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.**