



HDIM.NGO/1/06
2 October 2006

INSTITUTE ON RELIGION AND PUBLIC POLICY

Charter on Freedom of Expression and Journalistic Ethics in Relation to Respect for Religion or Belief

The Institute on Religion and Public Policy has been working in close cooperation and interactive partnership with religious communities, non-governmental organizations, diplomats and members of the media to draft, develop, and advance a Charter on Freedom of Expression and Journalistic Ethics in Relation to Respect for Religion or Belief.

This draft charter was created by taking into account over 40 national journalistic ethics codes, more than 300 professional journalist codes, and relevant documents articulating OSCE, Council of Europe and UN standards. We also incorporated suggestions and concerns articulated by NGOs and diplomats in meetings we held to discuss the Charter.

The purpose of our Charter is to provide a framework and establish standards to evaluate ethical media behavior in matters relating to religion or belief. The Charter takes into account the paramount principles of freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief and attempts to strike an appropriate balance that preserves both of these fundamental freedoms.

We encourage not only the media but all segments of society to use the Charter to hold the media up to ethical scrutiny when it depicts, reports or comments on matters relating to religion or belief.

No universal set of principles, rules or standards in this critical area regarding the depiction of religion or belief by the media currently exists. Without such principles and standards, there are no effective means to gauge whether news reports, comments or other depictions through cartoons, pictures or satire go over the line and engender discrimination or even violence targeting individuals due to their association with a religion or belief. We believe our Charter provides the guidelines to make that possible.

The need for a Charter on Freedom of Expression and Journalistic Ethics in Relation to Respect for Religion or Belief cannot be questioned. The events of the last few years and the instances where some religion is the target of hate speech, bias, stereotyping, misconceptions and misunderstanding in some country by some media have become legion. The time has come to articulate a set of standards and principles to guide the media in the area of religion or belief and to allow all segments of society to determine whether those standards have been violated through unethical conduct.

We hope that our Charter proves to be an essential and definitive document in the quest for tolerance and fairness towards all religions and beliefs by the media. The Institute is endeavoring to ensure broad use of this Charter. We are taking actions to ensure that the Charter is extensively disseminated and the Charter is published on our website:

www.religionandpolicy.org