

METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

2006 OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING

WORKING SESSION 13

***FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF FOR LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND
TRANSGENDER COMMUNITY***

Thank you Mr. Moderator. My name is Diane Fisher and I am a Bishop with Metropolitan Community Churches.

MCC is an international Christian denomination which works globally for justice and human rights. The church has a special ministry with the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities around the world. I work predominately in Eastern Canada, Eastern Europe, and within the United States.

It has been my experience while working Internationally with the church that the freedom of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender communities to express their faith and participate as fully included members within a religious context has been filled with discrimination, retribution, exclusion and violence.

One of the most vital factors in any civil society is the Freedom of Religion, the freedom of every individual to worship within the context of their own choosing.

We believe that each and every person has an innate right to the freedom of expression of their faith.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in

Article 2 that

Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.

And in

Article 18 that

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his or her religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his or her religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

The freedom to celebrate faith is at the core of human expression and yet, in many countries, freedom of religion is not a guaranteed human right. For the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community, individuals are not only denied the right to exercise their faith, but are often excluded, harassed, abused and even killed for their life style. In July of 2006 the lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender community in Riga, Latvia were denied their right to freedom of assembly when they approached the government to hold a gay pride march. When they were denied their right to march they organized a worship service at

a local church. During the service, within the sanctuary, the pastor and members of the worshipping community were pelted with Human excrement and rocks. This is appalling. This was obviously a hate crime directed at a lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. The act was unconscionable. Violence is never an appropriate response.

Many churches and faith traditions not only exclude the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities from exercising their right to worship in community but encourage their marginalization within society.

It is critical that so fundamental a Human Right as Religious Freedom reflect the broad diversity of a healthy Civil Society and recognize and protect the rights of those who may already be marginalized within the system.

On behalf of the many minority religious communities that bring vitality to your countries and which form a bedrock of spirituality within your society, we encourage you to give all possible due process to creating and implementing a firm and lasting legal framework that will guarantee full religious freedom for all people and all faith groups.

I call upon the COSE participating states to specifically include the right of freedom of assembly and the freedom of religion and belief for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender communities,

Thank you.

I am asking that you work and to commit to guarantee the rights for all people, including the lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender communities, to exercise their freedom of religion and belief and the freedom of assembly.

Thank you.