



Associazione culturale “**Giuseppe Dossetti: i Valori**”
TUTELA E SVILUPPO DEI DIRITTI

Osservatorio per la Tolleranza e la Libertà Religiosa
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2009 – Session 10

Statement by Dr. Mattia F. Ferrero
Coordinator of the
Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom
Associazione “Dossetti: i Valori”
(Italy)

Religion-based intolerance and discrimination have received attention only since a few years. We all view with appreciation the efforts of the ODIHR and of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office to combat such phenomena. But much work is still to be done.

Especially East of Vienna there are recurring episodes of hate crimes against Christian people or properties. The situation of Christian communities in Kosovo and Turkey may give rise to wider-scale conflict and violence. Profanations of Christian cemeteries and churches recently occurred in several OSCE Countries both East and West of Vienna: too often these crimes happen without an adequate response from the participating States. West of Vienna anti-Christianism appears as the last acceptable prejudice and there seems to be a tendency to play down intolerance toward Christians, because of Christianity’s position as the historically major religion.

Therefore the ODIHR and CiO Personal Representatives should focus their activity more to fulfilling the existing commitments and pay less attention to other concerns out the boundaries of the OSCE *acquis* on which there is not *consensus* and that are not matters of concern of the OSCE because not relevant for the security and stability of the Region.

Attention should be drawn also to denial of Christian Churches’ public role and exclusion of religious moral views from debates over public policy. The OSCE and its participating States should reject the claim that a democratic and pluralistic society have to relegate to the realm of private opinion its members’ religious beliefs and the moral convictions which derive from faith. The attempt to exclude Christian believers from public discourse in democratic societies is a subtle trend, but one that needs to be watched. Not only does it deny Christian believers a rightful participation in politics but it can also easily slide into more overt discrimination or intolerance.

It is also more and more widespread the false idea that religions are a negative fact, a fact that should



Associazione “Dossetti: i Valori”
Observatory for Religious Freedom and Tolerance

be fought against, instead of an element of progress and well-being of our societies. At this regard I find appropriate to remember that during the Follow-up Meeting of Vienna it was not reached the *consensus* on the proposal WT.78 that would put the right of practicing religion on the same footing of the preaching of atheism. If the freedom of religion or belief rightly protects also the non-believers, an anti-religious atheism which preaches the need to remove the religion from public and private life of the citizens should not be welcomed. A similar approach would be at odds with the very concept of religious freedom provided by the OSCE commitments, which protect the religious phenomenon as such.

Quite the opposite – according to Vienna 1989 Concluding Document – the OSCE and its participating States should engage in consultations with religious communities and promote the participation of these communities in public dialogue, even through the mass media. Consequently participating States should welcome the interventions of the representatives of religious communities that give their view – based on moral convictions deriving from faith – about everyday’s life and, in particular, on legislative and administrative provisions of their Countries. Unless instead of proposing the religious communities become coercive, this should not be considered as a manifestation of intolerance because they exercise their right to religious freedom, in particular the right of religious teaching. *Vice versa* was noted that it would be intolerant to seek to prevent the member of these communities from acting consistently with their own moral convictions or denigrate them just because they propose different options.

Too often in the media and public discourse there are episodes of disparagement of, or incitement against Christians or Christianity, especially the Papacy and the Christian moral teaching are ridiculed. There are also TV programs or videos on YouTube that show irreverent treatment of Christian symbols. In order to promote tolerance and non-discrimination the OSCE and its participating States should protect all religions – also the majority ones – from prejudices and misrepresentation, particularly in the field of education, culture and information. This will allow the public opinion to develop in a correct, mature way and it will foster a climate of mutual confidence and respect between religious communities as well as between believers and non-believers.

Dr. Mattia F. Ferrero

Coordinator

Associazione “Dossetti: i Valori” - Observatory for Religious Freedom and Tolerance

Mail address:
Corso Monforte, 2
I-20122 MILANO
ITALIA - ITALY

e-mail: mattia.ferrero@unicatt.it
Phone: +39-02-89452122
Fax: +39-02-89452125
Mobile phone: +39-339-6938096