

Verbal submission
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Somewhere in the OSCE region every belief community faces hate crimes and discrimination. The dynamics and language of hate and discrimination towards each community has of course its own terrible particularities. None the less it is clear that we have a great deal in common.

Hate crimes against one community almost always form part of a wider pattern of intolerance in society which demonises “the other” and in which the other has many faces – Jewish, Muslim, homosexual, Roma, Jehovah’s witness, evangelical Christian etc. Which groups are defined as the other and the degree and nature of violence varies between contexts. However, whilst it is important to recognise our particularities, it is equally important to recognise our commonalities. Somewhere each community represented here is defined as the other and targeted – we share that experience.

Given that it is almost never the case that only one religious group faces repression in a country, the Swedish mission Council considers that a focus on Freedom of religion or belief for all and on combatting hate and discrimination in broad terms is the most relevant approach. This doesn’t mean we can’t focus on violations against specific groups and work with those, what it means is that in any given national context we look at the full picture and give a full response.

In the light of this we would like to encourage the OSCE and ODIHR to complement the approach currently being taken which effectively separates religious communities into three groups Muslims, Jews and Christians and others. This approach has relevance but it bears with it certain risks.

- We fail to see the interconnectedness of the issues being faced across religious divides
- Opportunities to network and find areas for cooperation across religious divides are lost.
- We are not given opportunities to discover how the dynamics of our own belief communities might contribute to the problems faced by others.

States responsibility

States have a responsibility to respect, protect and promote the freedom of religion or belief of all in their countries. Yet a significant number of OSCE states actively discriminate against certain belief communities, placing de jure and de facto restrictions on their freedom of religion or belief. State media are active in promoting discrimination and hate crimes, sometimes going as far as to show names and photographs of their leaders and labeling them as traitors.

State limitations on the freedom of religion or belief contribute to polarisation between communities and state discrimination legitimises violence and discrimination practiced by other groups in society.

Religious communities also have responsibilities. All too often religious language is used by political leaders or faith based organisations to motivate fear of others. As faith organisations we need to act responsibly and work for rights for all. Let us be clear. If the state removes the rights of one group it removes the rights of all, because what we are left with is privileges that the state can remove at its leisure. However challenging faith communities may or may not find the

increasing religious diversity that characterizes our globalized world, we restrict rights and contribute to stereotyping at our peril.

As a Jewish representative in the Swedish inter-religious council recently commented “It is frightening when I hear that there is widespread public opposition to the building of mosques. It may start with restrictions on muslims but it will end up affecting us all.”

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