



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

ENGLISH only

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

**OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
 Prevention on Racism, Xenophobia and Hate Crimes Through
 Educational and Awareness-Raising Initiatives**

Vienna, 10-11 November 2011

**Session II: Challenges in Combating Hate Crimes, Racism and Xenophobia:
 Role of Awareness-Raising Initiative and Public Discourse**

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In the recent Report of the Group of Eminent Persons of the Council of Europe the possible clash between religious freedom and freedom of expression is mentioned as a risk to the values of our democracies.

On one side the freedom of religion or belief includes *inter alia* the right of religious communities and leaders to participate in public dialogue, even through the mass media. It means that they should be free to 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 they become coercive or incite to violence, 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.

On the other side freedom of religion or belief as such does not include the right for one’s religion or belief to be free from criticism or all adverse comment. But there is a big difference if the religion or belief is the target of critical analysis from a merely theological point of view or if there is an incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence against a religion. Between these two extremes, one can find all sorts of expressions and there is not a consensus about how and exactly where the frontiers of freedom of expression should be drawn.

As was recommended in the Astana High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Participating States should create an atmosphere of tolerance and appreciation of religions within which freedom of religion or belief can best flourish. This space should be open to



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all and the media can make a positive contribution to the promotion of tolerance, especially where they foster a culture of understanding between different ethnic, cultural and religious groups.

Freedom of expression should be therefore exercised responsibly and with due consideration for the believers’ feelings. In particular the media have the responsibility to give a fair and accurate account of the beliefs and to ensure that members of religious communities are given the chance to express their own views.

But too often the media and the Internet contribute to creating distorted images and negative stereotype, hostility and prejudice: there are recurring episodes of incorrect portrayal, disparagement of, or incitement against religions and religious communities. There are also TV programs or videos on YouTube that show irreverent treatment or provocative portrayal of religious symbols.

In order to promote tolerance and non-discrimination my Observatory urges the participating States to protect all religions – also the majority ones – from prejudice, negative stereotype and misrepresentation. Participating States are also called upon to adopt practical measures to assure that the media as well as the political and public discourse are respectful for religions, their representatives, teaching and symbols.

Moreover my Observatory urges the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media – in close cooperation with the OSCE-ODIHR and the Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief – to provide guidelines for voluntary professional standards and self-regulation of the media (or other mechanisms) in order to prevent intolerant discourse against religions.

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.

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