



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

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Our society is named after Giuseppe Dossetti, a prominent professor, politician and Catholic who spent his entire life in the Academia, in the Constituent Assembly and in the Catholic Church to promote religious freedom, being aware that the religious freedom is the cornerstone of all human rights. Inspired by his example we established the Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom.

Religious discrimination is one of the last prejudices to receive governmental attention and offences against Christians are probably the last form of religious intolerance to become a public issue. Intolerance and discrimination against Christians should not be underestimated. They are extensive, they take place in a variety of contexts all over the world and in the OSCE area as well, and they result in suffering for tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of believers. We all remember that few weeks ago three Christian Bible publishers were brutally killed in what had appeared to be a religious-motivated attack. One year ago, a Catholic priest, Fr Santoro, was also brutally murdered in Turkey.

In the Western World there seems to be a tendency to play down intolerance toward Christians, because of Christianity's position as the historically major religion. However, nowadays restrictions and intolerance against Christians take place also in West, where Christianity remains a majority religion. In fact Christianity is often under pressure from an assertive secularism.

In particular, attention must be given to exclusion of religious moral views from debates over public policy. Christian leaders of different Churches and religious communities often complain about this and the OSCE and its participating States should pay attention to this.

In the media there are episodes of intolerance and even of disparagement of, or incitement against Christians. Christianity, especially the Papacy and the Christian moral teaching not rarely are ridiculed in the media and in the public discourse. These are sometimes marked also by disinformation.

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, it can also easily slide into more overt discrimination or intolerance.



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Some times ago the hostess of a well known European airline company was suspended because she wore a little cross around her neck. Medical practitioners or secretaries have been sacked for refusing to deal with an abortion on the ground of their conscientious objection. Also the freedom of expression sometimes seems to be at risk. In February 2004, the British Columbia Supreme Court in Canada ruled that the British Columbia College of Teachers was within its rights to suspend high school teacher and student counsellor Chris Kempling for one month, without pay, because of letter he wrote to the editor of his local newspaper which were critical of some aspects of homosexuality. Last May, in Bologna, in Italy, a demonstration against homophobia became an aggressive show of intolerance against the Catholic Church. A lot of people were not allowed to enter the Cathedral of Bologna, where one of its biggest religious commemorations was celebrated. Insults and hate speeches against the Church and Pope Benedict XVI were shouted. Offensive graffiti and even death threats against Pope Benedict XVI and the President of the Bishops’ Conference were written on the walls of many Italian churches.

The OSCE and its participating States should reject the claim that a democratic and pluralistic society should relegate to the realm of private opinion its members’ religious beliefs and the moral convictions which derive from faith. Should citizens whose moral judgments are informed by their religious beliefs be less welcome to express their most deeply held convictions? Two years ago in the Cordoba Conference it was stressed that, whenever religious communities express concerns regarding legal provisions, this should not be considered as a manifestation of intolerance by these groups, unless these groups – instead of proposing – cross a line and become coercive.

In Cordoba it was stressed that undue restrictions remain against the registration of Churches and Christian communities. Sometimes it happens that, in the presence of a majority religion, civil authorities do not recognize the legal personality of Churches and these are subjected to limitations in other several issues often linked to acquiring legal personality (for example, acquiring property for a place of worship and other religious use; eligibility to establish educational institutions for training clergy; obtaining visas for missionaries or volunteers; arranging visits and ministries in hospitals, prisons, and the military; and so forth).

Christianity is the majority religion of many OSCE Participating Countries; indeed it has remarked the history, identity, culture and social life of their people. The specific contribution of Christians to the construction and well-being of our democratic systems is an added value for society. Only the acknowledgment of this contribution can be a guarantee and an expression of true pluralism.

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