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ENGLISH only

*The right to believe, to worship and witness
The right to change one's belief or religion
The right to join together and express one's belief*

WS II - Creating the conditions for meaningful and sustained interreligious dialogue

The human dimension commitments - which rest on the OSCE's comprehensive security concept that national and international security and human rights depend on each other - offer an agenda and aim for interreligious dialogue, Helsinki 2008 stating that participating States “support a pluralistic civil society and encourage partnerships between different stakeholders in the promotion and protection of human rights”. Our Agenda reminds us that “fruitful interreligious dialogue must be linked and related to human rights considerations and take place within an environment in which *[the]* human rights of all are safeguarded.” As the *European Union Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief*¹ note: “Religious tolerance as well as inter-cultural and interreligious dialogue must be promoted in a human rights perspective, ensuring respect of freedom of religion or belief, freedom of expression and other human rights and fundamental freedoms”.

For genuine dialogue to occur, participating States must implement their commitments. But participating States like Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan claim a commitment to interreligious dialogue while systemically violating human dimension commitments. To take two of many examples, Kazakhstan has used state intimidation to stop dialogues with the UN Special Rapporteurs on both Freedom of Religion or Belief and the rights to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and of Association.

If human dimension commitments are seriously violated, besides endangering security the trust essential for fruitful dialogue is also destroyed. So there can be no interreligious dialogue in the OSCE context without the context and aim being participating States implementing their human dimension commitments. Dialogue can become merely a camouflage for violations of commitments if it does not happen in a context where the human rights of all are safeguarded. Azerbaijan, for example, has initiated a so-called World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue while jailing growing numbers of prisoners of conscience for exercising freedom of religion or belief and other human rights.

Freedom of religion or belief embraces all people, so interreligious dialogue in the OSCE context should include those described in the human dimension commitments as non-believers. As such dialogue takes place in the context of human dimension commitments, the involvement of independent human rights defenders and those who may not be state-favoured is vital. This is both to help address all the relevant fundamental freedoms and because freedom of religion or belief is a freedom for all - including young people, women, and LGBTI people. An example was the *Norwegian Helsinki Committee Freedom of Belief Initiative in Turkey* convening the first meeting of all Turkey's religion or belief communities - including atheists - to address the denial of legal status to all.

What can constructively be done? Participating States, OSCE institutions and field operations could:

- insist that human dimension commitments are implemented in full by all participating States;
- insist that implementing freedom of religion or belief commitments is a non-negotiable foundation for all interreligious dialogue;
- situate interreligious dialogue within a human rights for all perspective, making its aim assisting implementation of the freedoms of religion or belief, expression, assembly, and other human rights and fundamental freedoms including the right to be free from torture;
- mainstream work to ensure and promote freedom of religion or belief with its interlinked human rights, building on the other work of the ODIHR Human Rights Department;
- use tools such as the *EU Guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief*, the *OSCE/Venice Commission Joint Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religion or Belief Communities* and the *OSCE Guidelines on the Protection of Human Rights Defenders*.²

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¹ http://consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/137585.pdf

² <http://www.osce.org/gsearch?qr=Guidelines>