



PERMANENT REPRESENTATION OF FRANCE  
TO THE OSCE

**Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
(Warsaw, 24 September – 5 October 2012)**

Working Session 10: Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief  
Monday, 1 October 2012

**French Delegation's statement on freedom of religion**

Madam Chair,

I fully back the declaration of the European Union.

France is highly committed to respect for freedom of thought and religion, which is a key human rights principle, as recalled in Article 10 of the 1789 Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.

This principle is very clearly defined in international human rights instruments to which France is bound, especially in Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 9 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

To promote freedom of religion, France implements the principle of secularism which is founded on a principle of respect. As the French Minister of Foreign Affairs Mr Laurent Fabius underscored before the Ambassadors of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation on 23 July 2012 in Paris, "the secular state supports no religion and disadvantages none." Yet it seeks to guarantee that everyone may freely believe or not believe.

Implementation of this principle of secularism requires, in particular, strict neutrality on the part of public agents who must not favour any religion over another. This does not mean that secularism is hostile to religions. On the contrary, secularism provides a shared framework for the coexistence or lack of different forms of religious expression and for the free exercise of religions in accordance with the private convictions of each citizen.

The fight against all forms of fanaticism or religious intolerance is a natural corollary of the implementation of secularism guaranteeing the free expression of pluralistic religious beliefs. As the French Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault recalled in his communiqué of 18 September 2012 "the values of tolerance and respect for religious beliefs, just as the principle of secularism, are central to our republican pact". The State in France thus exercises special vigilance to prevent instrumentalization of

secularism designed to justify manifestations of intolerance against individuals on the basis of their religion or beliefs, or the turning of secularism into a principle of exclusion. The State ensures that freedom of conscience and religion is exercised in accordance with other fundamental freedoms and conversely.

Likewise, the French authorities are committed to fighting sectarian abuses that are a misuse of these freedoms and undermine fundamental rights, security and the integrity and dignity of individuals.

Public authorities cannot ignore the tragedies experienced by the victims of sectarian abuses and their families. It is the duty of the State to protect all citizens when their rights are infringed by organizations that exploit the psychological and physical subjection in which their members find themselves.

The mission of the French Interministerial Monitoring Mission Against Sectarian Abuses (MIVILUDES), whose new President Mr Blisko is here with us, is to inform the public and coordinate the government's prevention and enforcement measures to address violations of laws and regulations by those groups or individuals. This in no way means that the State is to judge the beliefs or doctrines advocated by groups or individuals – which would be contrary to the principle of secularism – but that it should strive to suppress abuses of weakness and vulnerability of persons under a psychological hold as a result of pressure or techniques designed to alter one's free will.

We think it is essential for ODIHR to be able to take account in its work of the attempt to strike such a balance between freedom of religion and other fundamental freedoms, and of the fight against dangerous trends – whether fanaticism or sectarian abuses – in order to promote freedom of conscience or religion that is truly respectful of the individual and democracy.