

Homophobia Rising in Russia

A statement at the ODIHR HDIM on 26 September 2013
by Hans Christian Cars on behalf of the European Humanist Federation

According to a recent study by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency, almost half of all lesbian women, gay men, bi-sexual or transgender people were exposed to harassment or discrimination in Europe during the past year.

You may wonder, what this has got to do with Freedom of Religion and Belief.

Well, there is ample evidence of homophobia in the Bible and many Muslim leaders and their followers regard homosexuality as a crime, even so severe such people deserve to get killed.

It is also a matter of beliefs. Humanists believe that “gay is OK” meaning that every human being is entitled to live his or her life according to his/her sexual orientation. Homosexuality is not a disease, it is not anything for which one should be punished or badly treated, nor something from which one needs to be cured.

The FRA study does not cover the Russian Federation, but the situation for LGBT persons is becoming more and more critical in Russia, partly due to the growing influence of the Orthodox Church. Russia has recently adopted a law forbidding propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations to minors. It is not difficult to imagine the kind of signals that this is sending. Incidents of discrimination and violence have already become more frequent.

As the propagation amongst minors of non-traditional sexual relations has now become illegal in Russia, pride parades may not be allowed in this country. As a matter of fact, such events have been banned already in connection with next year’s Olympic Games in Sochi. This is, indeed, a serious curtailment of one of the most basic human rights, the freedom of expression and perhaps also in violation of the Russian constitution.

The new anti-gay legislation must have pleased the Orthodox Church as did, indeed, the imprisonment of members of the Pussy Riot group, who uninvited gave a humoristic, satirical and political performance in an orthodox cathedral in Moscow on 21 February 2012.

In this connection, I would like to make three points:

1. We would wish that President Putin would cease to embrace - politically and otherwise - Patriarch Kirill, previously accused of having links with the KGB, now leader of the Russian Orthodox Church.
2. We demand that the two members of Pussy Riot who were charged with blasphemy be released and compensated for the injustice they have suffered for having criticised the close political links between the Russian Orthodox Church and President Putin.
3. Finally, we call on President Putin to take steps to achieve the abolishment of the recently adopted law forbidding homosexual people to show their love for same sex partners in the presence of young people.

Thank you for listening.