

## ODIHR 2013 HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING, WORKING SESSION 7

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The European Council of Religious Leaders - Religions for Peace (ECRL) deeply appreciates and fully supports ODIHR comprehensive human dimensions programmes, and expresses particular appreciation to the OSCE Chair-in-office Ukraine for our partnership during the joint roundtable “Inter-Religious Dialogue for promoting Freedom of Religion or Belief” in Vienna in May of this year.

There is a growing diversity of religions in Europe, including those who do not confess a particular religion or belong to an institutionalised religious group. The transformation of the religious landscape creates tensions. We need to consider how we can create unity in diversity of worldviews.

One goal should be to understand and build an appropriate public space<sup>1</sup> :

The institutional dimension is characterized by systems, legal framework, and public administration. It is normative: fairness and even handedness; impartial treatment for building necessary trust irrespective of faith background. Freedom of religion includes the right to not be discriminated against.

The political dimension is the place for discussion. Issues of general interest are debated. Media represent spaces for public debate. Civil society is a key notion in this aspect of the public space: associations, NGOs, advocacy groups, religious groups etc. Freedom is fundamental to the innovation that should characterise this aspect of public space. All voices can be heard, not least of minorities. If violence is entering the public space, which will limit and close the space, authorities need to intervene.

If we learn to understand the two dimensions we can build a public space that is fair (institutional) and inclusive (political).

No matter how legal frameworks promote freedom of religion or belief, commitments from religious and belief communities and their leaders are needed to secure this freedom. European Council of Religious Leaders expressed the essence of this commitment in its declaration ‘Freedom of Religion – rights and commitments’ from the mentioned meeting in Vienna: *“As religious leaders we recognise a particular obligation to speak out against threats to the religious freedom of others when they come from within our own communities.”* Appropriate actions following from these commitments require basic knowledge and appreciation of rights and commitments. Religious and belief communities and their leaders therefore need systematic training in issues related to Freedom of religion or belief.

The above leads me to the following recommendations:

### OSCE/ODIHR:

- a. Should intensify the systematic training of leaders of religious and belief communities in the rights and commitments connected with Freedom of Religion or Belief. This training should preferably be done jointly with representatives of religious traditions together with representatives of governments and other stakeholders in order to create understanding and respect across identities and roles. European Council of Religious Leaders stands ready to partner with OSCE/ODIHR in this endeavour on European and national level.

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<sup>1</sup> Following analysis drawn from Professor Silvio Ferrari, presentation at Council of Europe Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue, Yerevan 2 September 2013.

Governments:

- a. Should secure that the institutional aspect of public space is regulated to secure fairness and even handedness, and that the political public space is open and free to provide inclusiveness and participation for all, and encourage experimentation and innovation.
- b. Laws and practicing of laws on religions should not be based on the notion that religion or belief is the problem and needs to be restricted. Concerns around unlawful acts in the name of religion should be dealt with within the framework of criminal laws and not lead to introduction of restrictive religious laws.

Religious and belief communities should recognize the importance of cooperation and solemnly pledge:

- a. To work individually and collectively for the advancement of religious freedom, and to stand together when religious freedom is threatened, whether by States' excessive restrictions, actions or lack of action in the face of violence or threats of violence against religious communities.
- b. To speak out together in full solidarity against hate crimes which target religious, belief or other communities; and with a particular obligation to speak out against threats to the religious freedom of others when they come from within their own communities.

European Council of Religious Leaders: [www.rfp-europe.eu](http://www.rfp-europe.eu)