

Table of Contents

- *Nine OSCE countries try to silence human rights and religious freedom activists and NGOs*
 - *Warning issued on rising racism in Europe*
 - *Widespread hostility towards Muslims across EU*
 - *OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination*
 - *OSCE "Brussels Declaration"*
 - *Brussels OSCE Conference: USCIRF(*) Recommendations*
-

Nine OSCE countries try to silence human rights and religious freedom activists and NGOs

CSCE (15.10.2004)/HRWF (26.10.2004) - Email: info@hrwf.net - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - At the conclusion today of Europe's largest annual human rights meeting, United States Helsinki Commission Chairman Rep. Christopher H. Smith (R-NJ) welcomed the declaration of human rights advocates from 16 countries countering criticism by several former Soviet states of the OSCE's human rights work.

On July 3, 2004, nine OSCE countries - Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russian Federation, Tajikistan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan - issued a statement criticizing the human dimension activities of the OSCE. A subsequent document signed in Astana, Kazakhstan, by eight of the above signatories claimed that there are double standards in fulfilment of commitments concerning democracy and human rights.

"I welcome the declaration issued today in Warsaw. While many of the men and women who signed this document engage in human rights advocacy at considerable personal sacrifice and risk, they have clearly stated in their words their categorical disagreement with the negative evaluation of OSCE activity," said Smith.

"I joined the leadership of the Helsinki Commission in writing to the governments of those countries to challenge those views," said Smith. "In fact, the review of human rights issues just concluded in Warsaw is a strong reminder of exactly why the human rights work of the Helsinki process must continue with unabated vigor. The OSCE's implementation meetings remain a critical forum for NGOs to have their views heard."

This year's OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting drew record attendance by 220 non-governmental organizations from across the region. Many took advantage of the opportunity to present focused presentations at side events on a broad range of subjects.

During the meeting, the United States drew particular attention to the situation in Turkmenistan, where conditions have regressed to those of the Stalinist era.

Azerbaijani officials had prevented one human rights defender and religious freedom activist from attending the Warsaw meeting. On October 6, authorities at the Baku airport blocked Imam Ilgar Ibrahimoglu from boarding his Warsaw-bound flight. Ibrahimoglu was set to attend the HDIM session on religious freedom and speak out against the forcible seizure of his congregation's mosque earlier this year.

The United States Helsinki Commission, an independent federal agency, by law monitors and encourages progress in implementing provisions of the Helsinki Accords. The

Commission, created in 1976, is composed of nine Senators, nine Representatives and one official each from the Departments of State, Defense and Commerce.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Political regulation of Islam and foreign religions

HRWF Statement at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (Warsaw, 4-15 October 2004)

HRWF Int. (08.10.2004) – Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - In the 20th century, Belgium has welcomed waves of immigrants fleeing political persecution or looking for job opportunities.

Those immigrants brought with them their culture, their language and their religion. There is now in Belgium a strong Muslim community of about 350,000 people. For many years, the Belgian state has tried to accommodate them and to domesticate them.

In 1998, a so-called Muslim Executive was elected and approved by the state to serve as a mediator with the authorities on management and education issues. Unfortunately, from the beginning, the government has repeatedly intervened in the internal affairs of this representative body, including by seeking to influence its composition.

Throughout their first mandate, the Assembly and the Executive have had to work in difficult conditions: continuous interference of the state in their internal matters, eviction of elected candidates by the then Minister of Justice (vivid controversies about the discretionary screening procedure based on the work of the Intelligence Service), mistrust in the first president of the Executive government's manipulation of some Muslim movements to its own ends, lack of funding. All this led to continuous tensions in the Muslim community and to radicalisation of some Muslim movements towards the state's policy.

In 2003, the Assembly filled in, with sovereign power, some positions that had become vacant in its midst and in the Executive. The state refused to recognize those unilateral appointments (9 members out of 16 were set aside by the Minister of Justice on the grounds of so-called "radicalism") and the rift between the various actors widened dramatically. Under constraint, the Assembly and the Executive had to negotiate the appointment of the new members with the government. This compromise fuelled renewed anger in the Muslim community and divided it once more. The mandate of the Executive-bis as it was then called was validated by the government until 31 May 2004.

Last but not least, on July 15, 2004, the House of Representatives adopted a law drafted by Minister of Justice in charge of Religious Affairs Laurette Onkelinx (Socialist, francophone), which obliges Belgium's Muslim community against their will to re-elect all the members of its Assembly and its Executive despite their recognition by the state as its official interlocutor. The royal decree provides for the creation of a commission, which will organize the elections.

The Muslim community of Belgium complains about the state's discriminatory policy towards them, and rightly so because never would the Belgian state dare treat other recognized religions in that way.

Another policy of the Belgian state towards immigrants' religions is also questionable. In 1998, the Parliament adopted the Law Regarding the Establishment of Information and

Advice Centre and an Administrative Coordination Agency for Fight against Harmful Sectarian Organizations. In this regard, it must be noted that religions from India, Japan, Brazil, Nigeria and other African countries, mainly practiced by immigrants but also by Belgian converts, are suspected of being harmful cults and targeted as such by the state's religious policy although these countries have been hospitable to our religions.

The reciprocity principle must not always be beneficial to the West. Globalisation and freedom of movement contribute to the heterogeneity of our once homogenous societies, to cultural and religious diversity. States must be tolerant and adapt to this new reality, instead of harassing minority religious groups rooted in other countries and other cultures. The Belgian state, which organized the last OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fights against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination in Brussels a few weeks ago, should now translate its nice words about tolerance and non-discrimination into concrete actions.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

From institutionalised religious discrimination to equal opportunities

HRWF Int. (08.10.2004) – Website: www.hrwf.net - Email: info@hrwf.net - A proverb says that one must sweep his own doorsteps before sweeping someone else's, and OSCE member states in Central and Eastern Europe often complain that they are the privileged targets of criticisms in such conferences. That is why, as a citizen of the European Union, I am going to sweep the doorsteps of our common house. In the EU, quite a number of states keep and sometimes reinforce their constitutional provisions and laws in such a way that they strengthen what I call institutionalised religious discrimination.

As a starting point, I offer the example of a country of the old Europe: **Austria**. We recently published a report on religious discrimination in that country. The International Religious Freedom Report issued by the US State Department on 15 September highlights the same issue. What do both reports say about institutionalised religious discrimination in Austria? Before 1998, Austria made a distinction between two categories of religions: legally recognised religious communities and non-recognised religious communities. This system flouted the fundamental principle of equal opportunities for religious communities and citizens. Even so, after many years of fighting legal battles, a dozen religious communities managed to qualify for state recognition, but in 1998, Austria hastily revised its legal legislation and created a third intermediary category for the non-recognised religious groups that had applied for the higher status: religious confessional communities. New and stricter criteria were created for and imposed on them only: a 20-year existence, at least 10 years of which must be with the status of a confessional community; a minimum membership of at least 16,000 persons, etc. Only 4 of the 13 recognised religious groups and only 1 of the 10 new applicants meet the membership requirement. This gross, institutionalised religious discrimination is not acceptable.

Human Rights Without Frontiers urges Austria not only to repeal the 1998 Law on the Status of Religious Confessional Communities but also to dismantle the whole system of recognition, as UN Special Rapporteur Abdelfattah Amor recommended in his report after his visit *in situ* to Romania in fall 2003.

Moreover, a number of discriminatory laws in force before 1998 should be either abrogated or revised. The Law on Employment of Foreigners contains a discriminatory provision regarding employment of religious ministers from other countries when the

religion is not recognized in Austria. Other discriminatory laws concerning chaplainries in public institutions, fiscal and educational facilities should be revised as well. Also controversial is the creation of Federal Office of Sect Issues and other similar offices at the state level, which are accused of fostering social discrimination against minority religious groups. The funding by the Ministry for Social Security and Generations and the City of Vienna of *the Society against Sect and Cult Dangers* has also been questioned.

Austria is just one example of institutionalised religious discrimination. Many other Western European countries have a two-tiered or multi-tiered system of recognition of religions: **Germany, Denmark, Italy, Greece, Belgium** and others.

My country's doorstep also needs to be swept. In **Belgium**, some religions are financed by the state, while others are not. The faithful of non-recognized religions who wish to finance their religion are not able to do so and they are unable to prevent the state using their tax money to support the religions of others. The Foreign Workers' Law of 1999 is discriminatory towards non-recognized religions and should be revised so that missionaries of non-recognized religions have the same access to the Belgian territory as those of recognized religions. More discriminatory laws could be highlighted.

Even in **France**, a country where no religion is recognized by the state discriminatory laws target religious groups referred to as "sects", although the distinction between religions and sects lacks any legal foundation. Public funding of controversial anti-sect groups is also publicly questioned. Some observers believe the existence of and activities of the late MILS and now of the MIVILUDES, the *Interministerial Mission of Vigilance against Sectarian Deviation*, foster societal discrimination and intolerance against minority religious groups.

Considering the various forms of structural and institutionalised religious discrimination in Western Europe generated by the system of hierarchy of religions,

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int. urges those states, with the view of providing good examples to the new EU members, to those applying for EU membership, and to other OSCE participating States, to:

- Revise existing discriminatory laws on religion and religious matters;
- Disconnect the recognition of religions from the rights to be granted to churches and religious communities;
- Grant equal opportunities and equal rights to religious communities whatever their membership and their historicity.

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int calls upon the OSCE to:

- Identify those participating States, in which a two-tiered or a multi-tiered system is in force;
- Engage in a dialogue with those states;
- Organise an international conference on the issue of state recognition of religions and institutionalised religious discrimination.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Warning issued on rising racism in Europe

By Paul Ames

Associated Press (14.09.2004) Racism and religious intolerance are rising in Europe, with Muslims and Jews targeted in a misguided backlash against global terrorism and Middle East violence, delegates at an international conference on racism said.

Hostility toward Muslims has increased markedly over the past three years, a report by a human rights group said. Another found resurgent anti-Semitism has created a climate of intimidation.

"The situation is getting worse, not better," warned Bashy Quraishy, chairman of the European Network Against Racism. "There have been a lot of beautiful words, but we want to know what the politicians are going to do."

The two-day conference of The Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe drew government officials from more than 50 nations, religious leaders and more than 130 non-governmental organizations.

They received a grim picture. Although campaign groups complained about the lack of government statistics on hate crimes, they said there was overwhelming evidence that violence and intolerance on the rise.

"I'm here to launch a cry of alarm ... anti-Semitism is back, the monster is among us again," said Cobi Benatoff, president of the European Jewish Committee.

A new report from the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights found widespread hostility toward Muslims in Europe, with verbal and physical attacks as well as discrimination in employment and housing increasing markedly after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks in the United States and the Madrid train bombings on March 11.

The report found the views on terrorism have led to increased antagonism toward the 15 million-plus Muslims in the European Union sparking attacks "ranging from slurs and insults in the street to vandalism and serious physical violence."

Turkey's representative, ambassador Omur Orrin, appealed for governments and the media to avoid linking Muslims with extremism and terrorism.

"I regretfully notice a repeated tendency to equate violence and terrorism with a religion, namely Islam," Orrin said.

Aside from prominent attacks on Jewish cemeteries, schools and synagogues, resurgent anti-Semitism has led to "hundreds of attacks on ordinary people that go largely unreported and a climate of intimidation and fear in which the possibility of attack terrorizes whole communities," said a report by the New York-based Human Rights First.

The group's executive director, Michael Posner, said violence against Jews was coming both from neo-Nazi groups and from Arab immigrant youths responding to Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

While attacks on Jews and Muslims have grabbed headlines, campaign groups said racism in Europe was much wider, from Gypsies facing discrimination in housing and jobs in Eastern Europe to asylum seekers beaten "for sport" in Scotland.

Campaigners presented European governments with a wish list of measures to fight racism including:

- a common European definition of hate crimes and the adoption of specific hate crime legislation by all countries.
- increased monitoring and dissemination of data on racism and hate crimes.
- the appointment of a high official at European level to coordinate anti-racism policies.
- improved training of law enforcement officials to ensure better implementation of anti-racism legislation.
- more resources for education and public awareness campaigns.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Widespread hostility towards Muslims across EU

NNN (14.09.2004) - A new report by a human rights group has found that hostility towards Muslims is "widespread" across much of the European Union (EU), where followers of Islam are subject to verbal and physical attacks as well as discrimination in employment and housing.

Distrustful attitudes towards Muslims have grown since the September 11, 2001, attacks in the United States and the Madrid train bombings this past March 11, said the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights (IHF).

"As the fight against terrorism has been stepped up, and public debate has increasingly focused attention on Islamic extremism, Muslim minorities have come under growing pressure in these countries and elsewhere," said Aaron Rhodes, the IHF's executive director.

According to the 37-page report, the hostility goes beyond anti-Muslim sentiment. The report noted a rise in attacks on Muslims "ranging from slurs and insults in the street to vandalism and serious physical violence."

The report focused on complaints in Belgium, Britain, Denmark, France, Germany and Italy.

In Britain and Germany, Muslims have been targeted by police searches and arrests "in ways that have infringed on the rights of Muslims who have nothing to do with terrorism," it said.

In Italy and Denmark, politicians have publicly branded Muslims as a security threat, and Muslims in Belgium and France have been caught up in government efforts to prohibit girls from wearing traditional head scarves.

"In all these cases, moderate and peaceful Muslims have been victimised because of the views and acts of a minority of extremist Muslims who advocate violence and intolerance," Rhodes said.

Among the recent instances of hostility toward Muslims detailed in the report was an incident in June in Strasbourg, France, where vandals painted black swastikas and other neo-Nazi symbols on more than 50 graves at a Muslim cemetery and sprayed a wall with threats against a regional Muslim council.

Across much of France, "Muslims have reportedly experienced that they are stopped, questioned and searched by police solely because of their Muslim appearance," the report said.

In the six months preceding July, the French Association against Islamophobia received 101 complaints of discrimination, it said. Even in countries such as Denmark, known worldwide for its strong human rights stance, authorities are rejecting more Muslim applications for asylum, cutting social benefits for Islamic refugees and foreigners and tightening restrictions on permanent residence, it added.

Estimates of the number of Muslims in the 25-nation EU range from 15 million to 25 million, said the group, which confined its study to countries in western Europe.

In May, the EU widened to take in 10 mostly ex-communist newcomer nations from Eastern Europe in a historic enlargement that boosted its total population to 450 million. Although Muslim communities in most western EU nations are mainly composed of post-World War II labor migrants and their descendants as well as refugees and their families, they have a "shared experience of intolerance and discrimination," said the report.

"While many Muslims are born and raised in the countries where they reside and are citizens of these countries, they are typically still perceived as `foreigners,'" it said

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination

HRWF (15.09.2004) - Email: info@hrwf.net- Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - On September 13-14, Brussels was the venue of the OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination. This was the third event in a series of conferences on related topics held within the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) under the 2004 Bulgarian Chairmanship – Berlin hosted the conference on anti-Semitism (28-29 April), and Paris – on hate propaganda over the Internet (16-17 June).

The two-day conference ended with the adoption of a declaration condemning all forms of racism; xenophobia and anti-Semitism and other acts of intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslims. The Brussels declaration also incorporates a decision taken earlier by the OSCE Permanent Council by which the Organization's 55 participating States committed themselves to consider enacting or strengthening legislation that prohibits discrimination, to promote educational programmes to foster tolerance and combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination, to promote and facilitate an open and transparent interfaith and intercultural dialogue and partnership, and to take steps to combat acts of discrimination and violence against Muslims in the OSCE area.

Though not mentioned in the Brussels Declaration, the OSCE participating States seem poised to discuss in the next few months the establishment of a new post of Special Representative on Discrimination and Xenophobia. The idea was echoed by a number of NGOs and some delegations. At the concluding press conference, the Bulgarian Foreign Minister in his capacity of Chairman-of-Office confirmed plans on creating the post and on seeking the agreement of all OSCE participating States in the months preceding the Sofia Ministerial Meeting in December 2004.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

OSCE "Brussels Declaration"

Text of the Declaration read by Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy on 13 September 2004

Based on consultations, I conclude that OSCE participating States,

Reaffirming the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which proclaims that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,

Recalling in particular that Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights state that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion,

Recalling the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

Recalling the Maastricht Ministerial Council Decision on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination (MC.DEC/4/03) as well as previous decisions and documents, and committing ourselves to intensify efforts to combat racism, xenophobia, discrimination and anti-Semitism and to promote and strengthen tolerance and non-discrimination,

Recalling also the OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism in Berlin on 28 and 29 April 2004 as well as the OSCE Meeting on the Relationship between Racist, Xenophobic and anti-Semitic Propaganda on the Internet and Hate Crimes in Paris on 16 and 17 June 2004 and their results; and that the Conference in Berlin expressed concern and condemned anti-Semitism as a distinct and specific form of intolerance and developed operational recommendations for combating anti-Semitism,

Recognizing that acts of intolerance pose a threat to democracy, the values of civilization and, therefore, to overall security in the OSCE region and beyond,

1. Condemn without reserve all forms of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism and other acts of intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslims, incitement, harassment or violence against persons or communities based on race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status, wherever they occur;

2. Condemn organizations and individuals promoting hatred or acts of racism, xenophobia, discrimination, or related intolerance, including against Muslims, and anti-Semitism;

3. Urge participating States to adopt effective measures to combat acts motivated by intolerance and to speak out publicly against such acts;

4. Examine the need for a structural follow up within the OSCE to ensure implementation of the commitments on tolerance and non-discrimination;

5. Reject firmly the identification of terrorism and extremism with any religion, culture, ethnic group, nationality or race;

6. Declare unambiguously that international developments or political issues never justify racism, xenophobia or discrimination.

In addition, I note that the Maastricht Ministerial Council in its Decision on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, tasked the Permanent Council "to further discuss ways and means of increasing the efforts of the OSCE and the participating States for the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination in all fields." In light of this Ministerial Decision, I welcome the July 29 Permanent Council Decision on Tolerance and the Fight Against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination and, in accordance with that Decision, incorporate it into this Declaration.

1. The participating States commit to:

- Consider enacting or strengthening, where appropriate, legislation that prohibits discrimination based on, or incitement to hate crimes motivated by, race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status;
- Promote and enhance, as appropriate, educational programmes for fostering tolerance and combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination;
- Promote and facilitate open and transparent interfaith and intercultural dialogue and partnerships towards tolerance, respect and mutual understanding and ensure and facilitate the freedom of the individual to profess and practice a religion or belief, alone or in community with others, including through transparent and non-discriminatory laws, regulations, practices and policies;
- Take steps to combat acts of discrimination and violence against Muslims in the OSCE area;
- Take steps, in conformity with their domestic law and international obligations, against discrimination, intolerance and xenophobia against migrants and migrant workers;
- Consider undertaking activities to raise public awareness of the enriching contribution of migrants and migrant workers to society;
- Combat hate crimes, which can be fuelled by racist, xenophobic and anti-Semitic propaganda in the media and on the Internet, and appropriately denounce such crimes publicly when they occur;
- Consider establishing training programmes for law enforcement and judicial officials on legislation and enforcement of legislation relating to hate crimes;
- Encourage the promotion of tolerance, dialogue, respect and mutual understanding through the Media, including the Internet;
- Encourage and support international organization and NGO efforts in these areas;
- Collect and maintain reliable information and statistics about hate crimes motivated by racism, xenophobia and related discrimination and intolerance, committed within their territory, report such information periodically to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and make this information available to the public;
- Examine the possibility of establishing within countries appropriate bodies to promote tolerance and to combat racism, xenophobia, discrimination or related intolerance, including against Muslims, and anti-Semitism;
- Endeavour to provide the ODIHR with the appropriate resources to accomplish the tasks agreed upon in the Maastricht Ministerial Decision on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination;

- Work with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to determine appropriate ways to review periodically the problems of racism, xenophobia and discrimination;

- Encourage development of informal exchanges among experts in appropriate fora on best practices and experiences in law enforcement and education;

2. To task the ODIHR to:

- Follow closely, in full co-operation with other OSCE institutions as well as the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (UNCERD), the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) and other relevant international institutions and NGOs, incidents motivated by racism, xenophobia, or related intolerance, including against Muslims, and anti-Semitism in the OSCE area making use of all reliable information available;

- Report its findings to the Permanent Council and to the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting and make these findings public. These reports should also be taken into account in deciding on priorities for the work of the OSCE in the area of intolerance;

- Systematically collect and disseminate information throughout the OSCE area on best practices for preventing and responding to racism, xenophobia and discrimination and, if requested, offer advice to participating States in their efforts to fight racism, xenophobia and discrimination;

- Support the ability of civil society and the development of partnerships to address racism, xenophobia, discrimination or related intolerance, including against Muslims, and anti-Semitism;

This Decision will be forwarded to the Ministerial Council for endorsement at its Twelfth Meeting.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)

Brussels OSCE Conference: USCIRF(*) Recommendations

The USCIRF has urged that the U.S. government adopt the following Commission recommendations with reference to the OSCE and its member states. The USCIRF recommends that:

The OSCE create two positions to be appointed by the Chairman-in-Office: a Special Representative on Discrimination and Xenophobia and a Special Representative on Anti-Semitism. These officials would provide continuing high-level attention to these issues, including meeting periodically with the leadership of relevant countries to address serious problems.

The OSCE and OSCE participating states take concrete action to engage in a regular public review of compliance with OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief, and on racial and religious discrimination, including anti-Semitism, including by facilitating an active role by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) as part of that process.

The Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) be provided with the necessary mandate and adequate resources to hire experienced staff to monitor compliance with OSCE obligations on freedom of religion or belief and to combat discrimination, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. As part of its monitoring and provision of technical advice to participating states, ODIHR staff should coordinate with OSCE Missions, international organizations and NGOs.

OSCE participating states take specific steps to ensure that they are complying with their commitments to combat discrimination, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, as detailed in the 1990 Copenhagen Document on the Human Dimension. These commitments include adopting laws to protect against incitement to violence based on discrimination and providing the individual with effective remedies to initiate complaints against acts of discrimination.

OSCE participating states, while vigorously protecting freedom of expression, publicly condemn attacks targeting Muslims and pursue and prosecute the perpetrators of such attacks. Government leaders should be reminded that hostile rhetoric against any racial or religious minority may fuel an atmosphere in which perpetrators believe they can attack persons from that group with impunity.

OSCE participating states take all appropriate steps to prevent and punish acts of anti-Semitism, such as to publicly condemn specific anti-Semitic acts, to pursue and prosecute the perpetrators of violent acts targeting Jews or their property, and, while vigorously protecting freedom of expression, to counteract anti-Semitic rhetoric and organized anti-Semitic activities.

OSCE participating states ensure that efforts to combat terrorism not be used as an unrestrained justification to restrict the human rights, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, of members of religious minorities.

OSCE participating states bring their national legislation and practice into conformity with their international legal obligations regarding the right to freedom of religion or belief and the prevention of discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, and take steps to bring local laws and regulations on religious activities into conformity with international human rights standards and OSCE commitments.

OSCE participating states:

- permit all religious groups to organize and conduct their activities without undue interference;
- discontinue excessive regulation of the free practice of religion, including registration or recognition requirements that effectively prevent members of religious communities from exercising their freedom to manifest religion or belief;
- end the practice of unjustifiably denying registration to religious groups and then erecting obstacles to religious practice based solely on that unregistered status;
- permit limitations on the right to freedom of religion or belief only as provided by law and consistent with participating states' obligations under international law.

National governments of OSCE participating states monitor the actions of regional and local officials who violate the right to freedom of religion or belief, and provide effective remedies for any such violations.

OSCE participating states: (a) ensure that all persons are able to exercise their human right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion and belief without threat of harassment, discrimination, detention, imprisonment, or torture; (b) release immediately and unconditionally any persons who have been detained solely because of their exercise of the right to freedom of religion or belief; (c) ensure that detained persons are afforded humane treatment in accord with international standards.

() The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) is an independent U.S. federal government entity. As an independent agency, the views of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) do not represent official United States government policy.*

USCIRF was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor freedom of religion or belief in other countries and to advise the President, Secretary of State, and Congress on how best to promote it. The USCIRF would like to present the following information relevant to the important work of the OSCE Brussels Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination.

[Back to the Table of Contents](#)