

Statement by the representative of the Moscow Patriarchate on freedom of conscience.

Mr. Chairman,

The Russian Orthodox Church recognizes the importance of the freedom of conscience as crucial element of human rights as a whole.

The human freedom embodied in human rights mechanism can be realized only if all the definitions used in the mechanism are clear to everybody. That guarantees real law of order which is among the main aims of the OSCE-members. But the mechanism includes some categories which are expected to be understood by consensus. "Morals" are among such categories. I should remind that the European convention on human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as the Universal declaration of human rights and other international instruments contains "morals" as a basis for limitation of particular human rights. The rights are: freedom of religion (Art. 9), freedom of public expression (Art. 10) and others.

"Morals" cannot be set up in a form of legal definition, because it's primarily self-limitation of a free person. The morals are result of education, beliefs, cultural development. In Europe morals are mostly based on Christian history and culture of the continent. Most Christian moral rules are common to other traditional European religions such as Judaism and Islam.

The human rights mechanism, as I said before, needs common understanding of the morals as its element. Without such understanding nobody knows where the limits of human freedom are. But the global trend is to attribute morals to private life. Most people say that morals are conventional, relative and out of date. However, those who created international documents on human rights expect the category to be a vital element of human freedom.

The exclusion of religious organizations from the spheres of education, public life, mass media leads to disappearance of morals from people's mind. But that also undermines human rights mechanism, making the freedom unlimited and destructive to human personality.

The linkage between freedom and morality is crucial for the future of Europe. Our Church testifies that losing of morals will result in disappearance of freedom.

Mr. Chairman,

Yesterday, I visited a side event organized by European humanist federation and asked the freethinkers to explain the phenomenon of morals from scientific point of view. The only thing they said was that morals are some deep social instinct. I would agree with the point, but why some people have this instinct some not? And more important: why does society sometimes punish those who don't have such an instinct? In that case they are not guilty. And most OSCE countries still prosecute those who practice incest, pedophilia, polygamy. These are crimes against morality as they are not necessarily connected with violence.

The traditional religions define morals as rules given by God to realize love to Lord and neighbour. This is how morals have been always understood in Europe. Such morals unite society if moral norms are freely accepted by people by means of education and bringing up.

Immoral society will atomize and ruin itself. Unfortunately we already witness such processes. The growth of egoism, consumption ideology, downfall of family values, depopulation are directly connected with absence of moral dimension in personal freedom.

That's why the Russian Orthodox Church urges the OSCE member-states to take morals into consideration while implementing all human rights obligations. We also fully support the states which don't agree to support and legitimize such models of behavior which have been always considered to be wicked and sinful throughout European history. The opposite will simply make human freedom destructive for society. The traditional religions can be active partners of state in establishing morals in public life. The partnership is vitally important in such spheres as education, access to the mass media, interreligious dialogue.

Thank you for your attention.