



Delegation of Canada
to the OSCE

Délégation du Canada
auprès de l'OSCE

OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2017
Working Session 6 – Statement by the Delegation of Canada
Thursday, September 14, 2017

Canada strongly encourages all countries to work together to respect, protect, and advance the right to freedom of religion or belief for members of all faith and belief traditions around the world. We must be willing to stand up to the growing discrimination and xenophobia facing many of these communities. With the advent, growing use, and popularity of social media, this is an issue that now affects the world online as well as offline, and we recognize that Canada, like all OSCE participating States, is not immune to this challenge. Regrettably, hateful messages and the targeting of individuals on the basis of religion or belief can now take place on digital platforms with real world consequences.

A 2017 Pew Research Study demonstrates that more than half of all countries globally have experienced increases in government restrictions on religion or belief. Unfortunately, this includes seven OSCE participating States that rank as having very high government restrictions on exercising the right to freedom of religion or belief, while another five were found to have high restrictions.

One major challenge faced by religious communities in these participating States is the lack of recognition resulting from onerous and opaque state registration procedures. We continue to hope that ODIHR's 2015 Guidelines on the Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities will help participating States address these issues.

Canada understands - and research shows – that respect for diversity and human rights, including freedom of religion or belief, and the promotion of inclusive policies and legislation foster the growth of strong democratic institutions, stability, and long-term prosperity.

We would like to propose the following four recommendations for this session:

- 1) That participating States ensure that legislation pertaining to the registration of religious organizations embraces the principles of Article 18 of the ICCPR; and that legislation is not used to obstruct and curtail activities of religious communities, as seen recently in the case of Jehovah's Witnesses in certain countries;
- 2) That participating States respect the right of those individuals who wish to change their religion or belief, hold no belief, or ascribe to what some states consider "non-traditional" religions;
- 3) That participating States ensure that religious communities are able to peacefully practice their religion without the threat of intimidation, violence, or persecution, and that any such threats or attacks are fully investigated and the perpetrators brought to justice;
- 4) That participating States cooperate and work closely with ODIHR's Human Rights and Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Departments to benefit from their expertise and experience, so as to foster the implementation of their OSCE commitments on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, as well as combat hate crime and discrimination on the basis of religion.