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[contact@freedomofbelief.net](mailto:contact@freedomofbelief.net)

[pressoffice@freedomofbelief.net](mailto:pressoffice@freedomofbelief.net)

[spokesman@freedomofbelief.net](mailto:spokesman@freedomofbelief.net)

<http://freedomofbelief.net>

**OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights  
Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2015**

**Working session 15: Fundamental freedoms II  
Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief**

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## **STATEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN FEDERATION FOR FREEDOM OF BELIEF (FOB) about freedom of belief in Italy**

Wednesday, 30 September 2015

I am Alessandro Amicarelli, a London-based human rights lawyer and spokesman of the European Federation for Freedom of Belief aka FOB, that I represent here today.

Our Federation, which is registered in Strasbourg and Bruxelles as a lobbying group since December 2014, consists of NGOs and individual members from six countries and it's growing.

We care about the right of all people to enjoy the right to freedom of belief – any of them including religious, philosophical and spiritual ones – in the European continent.

Today we would like to address two main points as follows :

1. We officially demand the Italian Government to issue a clear statement about the abnormal Anti Cult Squad (Squadra Anti Sette – SAS) that was established on 23 November 2006 with a simple circular letter of the then chief of Police, providing figures about the activities carried out by this unit of the Italian Police, their effects in contrasting alleged criminal activities of religious groups they roughly label as cults and giving evidence of the cost/benefit ratio; considering that so far all cases brought to Courts thanks to the SAS investigations have ended in favour of alleged criminals who were instead innocent people who suffered an unjust prosecution.
2. At the same time we want to emphasise that even though the Italian Constitution grants the right to freedom of belief and to practise religion to all people and that so does the ECHR, nonetheless two Italian regional authorities, namely Lombardy and Veneto, have either passed in the first case or proposed in the latter, tough and strict legislations that prevent religious minorities from building up their own temples, churches and mosques through a long series of requirements that only apply to minority groups, regardless they have or not an Agreement with the State; it needs also to be said that the previous worship places legislation, that has been made tougher with the new one, has caused at least in the case of Lombardy, the closure of a number of temples and churches that amount to roughly 50 of them only in 2013/14. ./.



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Additionally because of these legislations Lombardy resident Muslims still don't have a proper mosque as at September 2015.

In this regard we insist that the Italian authorities have to take any effort to ensure religious freedom be enjoyed by all religious groups, both in the form of not imposing restrictions that make it impossible for such groups to enjoy religious freedom, and also in the form of adopting national legislations that would favour an equal treatment of all individuals and groups in line with and as required by the Italian Constitution (articles 3, 8, 19..) and by the International and European Human Rights Instruments (ICCPR art. 18 / ECHR art. 9).

Thank you!

**Alessandro Amicarelli, spokesman**  
on behalf of FOB,  
*European Federation for Freedom of Belief*