



SOTERIA INTERNATIONAL intervention on Wednesday 30th September during

WORKING SESSION 15: Fundamental freedoms 2

- Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

Ladies and Gentlemen, friends and colleagues working to secure human rights!

As always, this day of freedom of religion and belief is the busiest here at the HDIM!

Hate crimes and discrimination based on religion increase.

Soteria International many times advocates for the outcasts of religions; the so called “sects”. A “sect” is who we all “know” is strange and subversive, without needing to actually know anything about them. What is a “sect” here today, may well be normal in another place or time. Jesus, Mohammed, Luther - they were all persecuted as leaders of a “sect”.

We may well conclude that the arbitrary use of the term “sect” illustrates a general lack of insight, substantial discourse and personal experiences in the field of spiritual life.

Information and insight have proven to be successful weapons to combat other discrimination such as racism, homophobia, discrimination of roma etc. Today we have specific campaigns against anti-semitism, islamophobia and anti-christianism. Still, the core issue is not about protecting any specific religious group, but to stop the general ignorance and fear regarding religion and the role of spirituality in human life.

Today the inner human spiritual drive is met either by secular denial or dogmatic religious denial. Both cultivate religious intolerance, ignorance and fear, leading to discrimination and hate-crimes.

By necessity combatting religious discrimination needs to shed light on the actual question; what are common human spiritual principles and what is spirituality's role in human life? This should be the aim of national as well as international institutions, such as ODIHR.

In Belgium the buddhist Tibetan organization Ogyen Kunzang Chöling after 18 years investigation, the court recognised that the reasonable time had elapsed. This started in Belgium in 1997 with the “sect-list” which created lots of stigmatization and social marginalisation.

From our field investigations in the Czech Republic last month, we conclude that the hindu mystics Dobes and Plaskova and members of their religious group Poetrie, have been

subjected to warrantless arrests, searches and different forms of psychological pressure, threats, intimidation and physical harm by Czech police, solely due to their religious affiliation.

The initial police investigation regarded human trafficking, which does not appear in the trial at all, but seems to be just a media scam to tarnish the image of the group members, describing them as a subversive “sect”.

Recommendations:

We recommend the proper authorities to investigate possible human rights violations in the case of Jaroslav Dobes and Barbora Plaskova, especially when it comes to collaboration between police, prosecutor, anti-sect movements and media.

We recommend the Belgian authorities to not use the “sect-list” as a reference in any way.

We recommend international and national institutions of the OSCE member states to consider any use of the term “sect” as religious discrimination.