



**SOTERIA INTERNATIONAL contribution to WORKING SESSION 7:  
Fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or  
belief**

**13<sup>th</sup> September 2018**

**HOW UNIVERSAL IS THE UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN  
RIGHTS TODAY?**

**Recommendations:**

- **Soteria International recommends ODIHR and the OSCE member states to explore how to guarantee the universality of human rights as universal principles, rather than cultural expressions.**
- **Soteria International recommends ODIHR and the OSCE member states to explore how religion and spiritual systems from a universal perspective may provide answers to fundamental human needs and tools for developing human potentials.**
- **Soteria International recommends the OSCE member states to the educational system to play a major role in reintegrating religion and belief as a constructive part of our lives. By integrating and understanding religions and belief systems by their universal principles, we overpass the differences between cultures, traditions and religions.**

At the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights we would like to ask: How Universal is The Universal Declaration of Human Rights today?

Especially when it comes to Freedom of Religion and Belief we find great confusion, where even in the heart of Europe we find that what would pass as civil service in a secular frame (such as coaching your child's football team), when practiced in a religious context (offering one's service as karma yoga) can be tried as a criminal offense (human trafficking).

The Human Rights Council's "Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief" from February this year underlines the culturally biased

application of freedom of religion and belief. Many of us who sit here today notice it daily.

Some have questioned why Freedom of Religion and Belief needs special protection, apart from freedom of speech, opinion, assembly etc. The question seems to find support also in the vague and culturally biased understandings of what religion or belief actually is, especially when it comes to new religious movements.

Let us at the same time underline how the vague definition opens for state institutions to ignore culturally unfamiliar expressions of religion and belief, risking to abusively subdue the individuals' freedom of religion and belief. We would suggest to explore what happens if the concepts of religion and belief would relate to universal principles at the core of religion or belief, rather than cultural expressions?

Let us consider the development of universal principles within science, where the practitioners – researchers - in an organic and ongoing process have practically and by common experience come to define certain unifying and universal principles of science.

Just as in the relation to science, the state and international institutions should explore how to encourage the human potential in religion and belief, beyond fixed positions of theocracy or secularism. By supporting the organic development of inter religious discourse and the exploration of universal principles of religion, the state and international institutions would support the integration of religious dimension of human life as source of prosperity and health at all levels.

Education would play a major role in reintegrating religion and belief as a constructive part of our lives. By integrating and understanding religions and belief systems by their universal principles, we overpass the differences between cultures, traditions and religions.