

Working group 28

The common space between religious traditions and human rights

Background

In the past, religious convictions played a key role in the formulation of human rights principles. For example, they were important drivers in the prohibition of the slave trade and the abolition of slavery in the US. Another example comes from the Quran. It equates killing a soul with killing humankind entirely and saving a soul with saving humankind entirely.

According to Article 17 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, the EU should respect and not prejudice the status of churches and religious associations or communities in the Member States under national law. In addition, their identity and specific contribution should be recognised.

The importance of freedom of thought, conscience and religion has also been stressed on several occasions by the European Court of Human Rights. It is one of the foundations of a democratic society. More specifically, judges regard religious freedom as being vital to believers and their concept of life. Over the past ten years, the number of cases examined by the Court under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights has been constantly growing. This trend can largely be explained by the increasing role of religion and associated questions in the socio-political arena.

Objectives

The current debate surrounding religion and human rights tends to focus on division and difference. This workshop sought to offer a contrasting view by examining the common space various religious traditions share with key human rights principles.

Speakers

- H.E. Mgr Theodorus Cornelis Maria Hoogenboom, Auxiliary Bishop of Utrecht, Commission of the Bishops' Conferences of the European Community (COMECE)
- Chief Rabbi David Rosen, Member of the Board of Directors, KAICIID; International Director of Interreligious Affairs, American Jewish Committee
- Alpesh Patel, Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies
- Aicha Haddou, Vice President, European Muslim Research on Islamic Development
- Bashy Quraishy, Secretary General, European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion (EMISCO)

- Elizabetha Kitanovic, Executive Secretary for Human Rights, Conference of European Churches (CEC)

Main messages

1. There are connection between religious traditions and human rights and duties.
2. There is a need for institutional dialogue between the EU and representatives of faith based and other world views.
3. Religion is a strong motivation for human rights activism (but also a source for many human rights violations).

Promising practices

- Human rights training manuals / summer schools on different topics such as religion and belief, Conference of European Churches.
- Dialogues seminars with the European Commission in accordance with Art. 17 TFEU, on for example human trafficking, Commission of the Bishop's Conferences of the European Community (COMECE).
- Leaders of different religious groups have preached together to encourage the European society to be inclusive of refugees Lesbos.

Next steps

- There should be more teaching about human rights, but especially human duties in schools (especially single faith schools), places of worship and in the workplace from a young age, to counter media propaganda. Religion should not be linked to traditions, such as in the case of Islam and practices like Female Genital Mutilation.
- Religious leaders and government institutions should play a big role in creating a common space based on on-going constructive dialogue between (non-) religious groups and the government.
- Schools and kindergartens should educate by interaction to show that core values of different religions are similar. Note there are pros and cons of creating a mandatory curriculum for pupils.
- Independent institutions in all EU Member States should enforce the same legal standards across Europe.
- European and national legislators and policy makers should use easier language so citizens can understand their human rights and duties.
- Civil society should organise social events to bring people from different convictions together (creating a common public space) to further mutual respect and tolerance. The media should play a big role in that as well.
- Religious leaders, but also civil society in general, should promote diversity within religious organisations.
- European and national authorities should create better opportunities to bring legal claims for rights violations.

- Civil society should create More European associations among religious or belief communities.