

## OSCE

### **Institutions and discrimination of religious and spiritual minorities in Italy and Romania**

HRWF (03.10.2013) – The Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) houses the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), the all-important European Conference on Human Rights, every year in Warsaw.

Sept. 26<sup>th</sup>, 2013 was devoted to “Freedom of Religion or Belief”.

The Italian delegation introduced two Statements and partake in the Side Event organized by Soteria International about: Institutional Discrimination and Stigmatisation of Religious and Spiritual Minorities.

#### **Statements by Soteria International and Atman Yoga School, Italy**

**September, 26<sup>th</sup> 2013**

**Morning Working Session 6**

#### **SOTERIA INTERNATIONAL - STATEMENT**

My name is Raffaella Di Marzio. I've been running the Centre for Information and Advise - Sect, Religions and Spirituality in Rome for 12 years. I've been studying and researching the phenomenon and the spreading of religious and spiritual minorities in Italy for almost 20 years. According to the data provided by CESNUR (directed by Massimo Introvigne) in 2012, 836 organized minorities, both religious and spiritual, are present in Italy, 200 more compared to 2001.

For the last 15 years, my country has been witnessing the growing of dangerous scenarios of intolerance against religious minorities, as well as spiritual, which are variously labelled and stigmatized as “cults”, “psycho-cults”, “satanic cults”, “destructive cults”, etc.

This *ad hoc* manufactured alarm was such that in 2006 the Ministry of Interior established an Anti-Sect Police Squad (SAS) which “*would have committed blatant miscarriages of justice in Florence, Bari, Assisi etc., as it is coordinated by contact persons and “experts” belonging to anti-cult movements. As a result, we can see the fostering of a mood of diffidence that is jeopardising the inclusion of religious minorities in the country, while endorsing a “cult alarm” not supported by facts; [...] SAS law enforcement agencies operated with the almost unique help of the “Anti-cult Forum”; although it seems they have no proven scientificity in their research methods, nor academic superiority in any fields, it is a member of FECRIS, a French body known for the controversies regarding accusations of religious intolerance...*” (Senators Perduca and Poretti, 16<sup>o</sup> Legislature, Atto di Sindacato Ispettivo N. 4-08595, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

A number of MPs suspected that SAS activities were incompatible with the Italian Constitution, the European Convention on Human Rights and the guide lines of the Council of Europe (Senators Perduca and Poretti, 16<sup>o</sup> Legislature, Atto di Sindacato Ispettivo N. 4-08595, November 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012; MP Binetti, 16<sup>o</sup> Legislature, Atto di Sindacato Ispettivo N. 3-02387, Thursday, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2012, session N. 665; MP Pastore, 16<sup>o</sup> Legislature, Atto di Sindacato Ispettivo N. 3-02822,, April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2012, session N. 716).

For the past years, tenth of religious and spiritual minorities have been persecuted and defamed in Italy with very serious charges based on the “cult” stigma. I'll cite just a few examples, such as Ananda Assisi, Bambini di Satana (Children of Satan), Osho Campus, Damanhur, Anima Universale (Universal Soul), Osho Miasto; these spiritual associations were brought to court, tried

and mostly acquitted; in a few cases the crimes were committed by individual members and never involved the whole organization. The most recent case is the spiritual-anthropological association Arkeon, originally charged by a FECRIS member organization backed by media, to be the most dangerous psycho-cult ever existed in Italy and to mentally manipulate its members. Judges found that the main and more serious charge against Arkeon, that of being a “psycho-cult”, was totally ungrounded (Verdict N. 6445/06RGNR; n. 2492/09R.G.Trib.; 1558/12 Reg. Sent. p.896-897, July, 16<sup>th</sup> 2012, deposited on January, 10<sup>th</sup>, 2013).

### **Recommendations**

**I’m here to point out to OSCE, which operates to ensure peace, democracy and stability, the risk that Italy experiments limitations or violations of religious freedom for minorities, and to ask to Italian authorities:**

- **to investigate, also through a Commission of Inquiry, and check the constitutionality and legality of the Anti-Sect Police Department and the honesty of its activities, particularly in regard to the contact persons it relies upon to monitor religious and spiritual groups;**
- **to verify if the Anti-Sect Police Squad, in its finalities and operations, is violating the constitutionally protected right to profess one’s own religion and beliefs;**
- **to undertake strategies of reception and constructive dialogue towards religious and spiritual minorities in Italy, so to promote integration and pacific coexistence.**