



Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

(print version)

Press release

Switzerland's Muslims discuss creation of umbrella organization at meeting co-hosted by OSCE/ODIHR

BERN, 22 October 2010 - Representatives of Switzerland's Muslim communities will discuss how the interests of Muslims can be presented more effectively at the national level, including through the possible creation of an umbrella organization during a conference hosted in Bern tomorrow by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the Swiss Federal Commission against Racism.

"The outcome of last year's referendum on the banning of minarets showed that serious efforts should be made to promote a more engaged dialogue between civil society and the government on issues affecting Muslims in Switzerland," said Douglas Wake, ODIHR's Deputy Director.

Georg Kreis, the President of the Federal Commission against Racism, stressed that the establishment of a national umbrella organization could enable religious or ethnic minorities to strengthen their voice in the political process and public debate.

The conference brings together more than 30 Muslim non-governmental organization representatives and community leaders from different cantons, regions and cities of Switzerland. Representatives of the Muslim Council of Britain, the Muslim Executive of Belgium and the Council of Muslims in Germany shared experiences from their countries. Working groups will discuss practical issues related to the establishment and the functioning of umbrella organizations, such as legal status, membership, representation and mandate.

In a referendum held on 29 November 2009, a majority of Swiss voters expressed support for a ban on the construction of minarets.

In a comment just after the referendum, the head of the ODIHR, Janez Lenarcic noted that a blanket prohibition of minarets was not consistent with OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief and the principle of non-discrimination based on religion. He also warned that singling out one specific community has the potential to create tensions and generate a climate of intolerance.

Contacts

Jens Eschenbaecher Spokesperson

- OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
 - Public Affairs Unit
 - Aleje Ujazdowskie 19
 - 00-557 Warsaw
 - Poland
 - Tel: + 48 22 520 0640
 - + 48 603 683 122 (mobile)
 - Fax: + 48 22 520 06 05
 - [Send E-mail](#)
-
- OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
 - Public Affairs Unit
 - Aleje Ujazdowskie 19
 - 00-557 Warsaw
 - Poland
 - Tel: + 48 22 520 06 00
 - Fax: + 48 22 520 06 05

© OSCE 1995-2010