

Appendix 19:

Joint declaration on the freedom of religion and the right to conversion

22.08.07

August 22 the Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations presented a joint declaration on the freedom of religion and the right to conversion.



Left to right: Leader of the Islamic Council of Norway, Senaid Kobilica, Church of Norway pastor Anne Hege Grung, General Secretary for the Islamic Council of Norway, Shoaib Sultan and General Secretary for the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations, Olav Fykse Tveit.

- Freedom of religion is a fundamental principle which must be reflected in attitudes toward people of another faith. The right to change one's religious faith is central to freedom of religion, says Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary for the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations.

- By issuing this declaration we hope to contribute to the international process on this important matter, he says. In Norway there are few conversions from Christianity to Islam or vice versa. Nevertheless the two bodies underline that there should be no doubt that freedom of religion, with the right to conversion, is a fully acknowledged principle, reflected in attitudes and accepted in practice, both by the Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations.

A core issue

Since 1993 important processes of interfaith dialogue have taken place between the Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations. In this dialogue work, freedom of religion is a core issue.

This ongoing dialogue is based on the fundamental values of mutual respect and trust. Its purpose is to prevent conflicts and to create space for understanding between Muslims and Christians as they relate to each other and to Norwegian society in general. A particular task has been to challenge prejudices and stereotypes in their conceptions of each other and to combat islamophobia and discrimination of the Muslim minority in Norway.

Joint Declaration

The Islamic Council of Norway and the Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations jointly declare that everyone is free to adopt the religious faith of their choice. We denounce, and are committed to counteracting all violence, discrimination and harassment inflicted in reaction to a person's conversion, or desire to

convert, from one religion to another, be it in Norway or abroad.

We interpret our religious traditions such that everyone has the right to freely choose their religious belief and faith community, and to practice their religion publicly as well as privately.

Missionary activity and information to others about our faith must be done according to ethically accepted standards, that is, without the use of any form of force or manipulation. If freedom of religion is to be upheld, all conversion must happen freely.

As religious communities we experience joy within our respective contexts whenever a person wishes to share our faith and join our religious community. Therefore we also respect a person's right to convert to a different religion than our own.

Oslo, 22nd of August 2007

Shoaib Sultan, General Secretary Islamic Council of Norway
Olav Fykse Tveit, General Secretary Church of Norway Council on Ecumenical and International Relations

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COMMENT FROM BARNABAS AID Nov/Dec 2007 p. 11