



Religious freedom and the rights of the individual charter of good conduct

1. Religious freedom is a necessary condition of democratic life. Modern rights, both national and international, elevated it to the rank of a fundamental freedom¹. Freedom of conscience and religion is essential to any true personal or collective spiritual endeavor. Any religious group - old or new, major or minor, institutional or otherwise - has a right to this freedom as well as a duty to respect it.
2. Freedom of conscience and religion gives everyone the right to believe, not believe or to change faith, as well as the right to express, practise and reveal one's personal convictions. It guarantees everyone the right to orient one's conduct and way of acting according to the teachings and prescriptions of one's religious conviction, that is: "any form of representation linked to the relationship that humans have with the divine, respectively the transcendental"². Expressed collectively, this freedom includes the right to assemble and to organize as an association, according to the rights of the country.
3. Individual freedom has its limits in the freedom of others, thus a religiously polyvalent society must guarantee religious peace. It is the responsibility of public powers, civil society, traditional religious communities as well as those more recently created to find a modus vivendi that will permit justice and set aside discrimination.
4. The facilitation of such a coexistence shall be provided by the institutions of the secular state, which refraining from all forms of segregation on religious matters, should guarantee equity in the treatment of all those belonging to a religious community, as well as those not belonging to any religious community. The religious neutrality of the State offers believers, whoever they be, the possibility to practise their faith within society respecting good morality and public order.
5. Belonging to a religious group gives direction to human existence and may help it flourish, yet it can lead to abuses and perversions that may harm human dignity. For these reasons the present "Charter of Good Conduct" can be applied to individual, collective, social and inter-religious relationships.
6. Any individual can freely join or leave the religious group of his/her choice. None shall endure damage to personality particularly discrimination in matters of employment by reason of religious faith. None shall be harassed for their convictions but shall be responsible for words and acts in relation to the system of laws. Public powers shall refrain from any meddling in the spiritual choices of a person. On the other hand, religious leaders should ensure the freedom of all new members and refrain from intimidation of those who wish to leave their community, particularly minors and vulnerable persons.

¹ Art. 49 and 50 of Federal Constitution, art. 303 of Civilian code, art. 9 European Convention of Human Rights, art. 18 Pact II, Declaration of the United Nations on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion. Human Rights declaration of the United Nations of 1948, International Charter on the Rights of Children , as well as art. 164 of the Constitution of Geneva which in fact only guarantees freedom of worship.

² Federal Tribunal Decree 119 Ia 178,183A

7. Any faith or religious group has the right to collectively express its beliefs through worship and private or public activities within the limits of public order and the respect of the common good. Any religious creed can freely disseminate its vision of the world without having to endure discriminatory measures against itself or its followers. Without excluding the debate of ideas, all propaganda aiming at the denigration of other expressions of faith or agnosticism is firmly proscribed.
8. In the spirit of tolerance, society welcomes religious diversity. Each religious community, ancient or modern has the right to have its ideas and its actions honestly presented and protected from abusive comparison and defamation. If a group is challenged it will agree to provide enlightenment concerning its religious, social or financial activities; in return, challengers will concentrate upon the incriminating facts and refrain from all abusive generalizations or insidious allusions.
9. Interreligious dialogue is apt to remove the fears and suspicions that may exist between long established communities and newly created ones. Conducted with respect for the convictions of others and with loyalty towards one's own convictions, such a dialogue does not exclude mutual critique; it opens the way to a peaceful coexistence determined by the rules of a game freely accepted and offers a favorable setting to find solutions to the tensions inherent in religious diversity.
10. A panel of observers of religious phenomena in which representatives of public powers, religious movements as well as scholars could participate, could be placed under the protection of the State and provide a place likely to prevent hasty judgments as well as shedding light in the event of persisting tensions or accusations of mental manipulations, sexual abuse or financial pressures.
In the same way, an ombudsman trusted by the various parties would contribute by providing mediation to resolve litigation cases.

In subscribing to the present Charter, the signatories wish to communicate their willingness to contribute to respectful coexistence with freedom for all and with the right to moral integrity for all. They commit themselves to correct all abuse that would objectively harm the rights of the individual. They wish to develop trust amongst social actors within the framework of their institutions and the laws of a State guaranteeing equality of treatment for all its people.

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