

CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN CHURCHES  
CONFERENCE DES EGLISES EUROPEENNES  
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## **WORK PROGRAMME OF THE WORKING GROUP ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM**

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### **1. Monitoring**

An ongoing priority of the Working Group and its members and staff is to maintain permanent monitoring of the United Nations, The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Council and Europe and the Institutions of the European Union as they address and act on issues of human rights and religious freedom. The aim of the monitoring is to keep CEC member churches informed about developments in this field, and to make sure the voice of European churches is heard by the relevant bodies of the organisations and institutions. Wherever possible the Working Group will involve representatives of member churches in the dialogue between the churches and the organisations/institutions.

In the years 2000 and 2001, special attention will be given to:

- development of an EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (in cooperation with the Working Group on EU Legislation);
- informing member churches about the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe and the possibility for the churches to file collective complaints via CEC's Commission for Church and Society;

- the Council of Europe's Ministerial Conference on Human Rights in November 2000. See text of CEC contribution;
- a training course for church representatives from central and eastern Europe in relation to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (October 2000);
- contributing to the work of the OSCE Advisory Board of Experts on Freedom of Religion and Belief;
- monitoring the UN Human Rights Commission, with special attention to issues identified by the working group.

## **2. Freedom of Religion**

As the name of the Working Group suggests, religious freedom is one of the key issues which the group should address. The Working Group has therefore set up a Working Party on religious freedom, which is mandated to identify the most crucial issues and to launch a process by which the member churches can become involved around these issues. Work in this field can be seen as a follow-up to the 1997 CEC consultation on "Church and State", and might well lead to another consultation in the near future.

Two consultations for CEC member churches are planned for 2001. The first one is to address the human rights aspects of the relationships among established churches, minority communities and new forms of religion. The second consultation, envisaged for 2001, is meant to identify ways of actively fostering tolerance for and between religious communities.

## **3. Conscientious Objection to Military Service**

The right to conscientious objection to military service was identified as a particular issue under the heading of religious freedom. The Working Group will up-date material and country surveys, which were published earlier by CEC in cooperation with the German Protestant Association for the Care of Conscientious Objectors (EAK). The up-dated material will be made available to member churches.

## **4. National Minorities**

As recent meetings of the Council of Europe and the OSCE have shown, the protection of national minorities remains as an important issues on the international human rights agenda. A short introduction to existing standards and mechanisms will be prepared for information of member churches.

## **5. Cooperation with the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME)**

In the framework of the agreement of cooperation between CEC and the Churches Commission for Migrants in Europe (CCME), the Working Group will support CCME on issues such as asylum and refugees, racism and xenophobia, Sinti and Roma.

Upon requests from churches in central and eastern Europe, CECs Working Groups on Human Rights and Religious Freedom and European Integration are in the process of organising, together with CCME, a consultation on the situation of Sinti and Roma in Europe. This meeting will deal explicitly with human rights standards and mechanisms for Sinti and Roma, migration policies, possibilities for promoting tolerance and preventing discrimination, and the implications for EU applicant countries.

## **6. Human Rights Training for Member Churches**

As a follow-up to the 1999 Human Rights Training-Seminar for churches in central and eastern Europe, the Working Group agreed on three projects, which offer additional training possibilities in relation to the UN Human Rights Commission, UN Treaty Bodies and the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting. Churches in central and eastern Europe are invited to nominate their candidates for these training possibilities.

## **7. A "Culture of Human Rights" and the Theological Basis**

As an ongoing concern, the Working Group will develop and launch initiatives to promote a "culture of human rights" within European churches. To this effect, the Working Group seeks to involve CEC member churches in a process of theological reflection as the basis for their commitment and their initiatives to promote the implementation of human rights.

At its last meeting, the Working Group on Human Rights and Religious Freedom devoted a considerable amount of discussion to promotion of a culture of human rights within its member churches and throughout Europe. The Working Group will put its emphasis on three areas:

- continuing to offer human rights training at the European level as well as within particular countries;
- an e-mail service to distribute relevant human rights information, which has already been launched;

- establishment of a European network of church-related human rights workers.

Churches, or individuals within churches, who are interested in any of these initiatives are invited to contact the secretariat.

## **8. Cooperation**

Further issues will be addressed in cooperation with other working groups and sectors of CEC:

- establishment of a European Churches Conciliation Commission (General Secretariat)
- Minority and Majority Churches (Dialogue Commission)
- Gender Issues (CEC's desk for the follow-up to the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women)
- Ethnicity, Religion and Conflict (Working Group on Peace in Security)
- Military Intervention for Humanitarian Purposes (Working Group on Peace in Security)