

The OSCE held a meeting on combating hate crimes against Christians in Rome on 12 September 2011. Vera Pegna represented the EHF and reports:

There were a couple of hundred delegates, mostly Catholic bishops, archbishops, but also representatives of other Christian religions, and Jews and Moslems and a number of ambassadors to the Holy See and government representatives. Plus a number of NGOs, mostly Catholic. The first half of the morning went by with infinite lamentations on how Christians are hated and discriminated against everywhere. The representative of the Holy See, Archbishop Mamberti, launched the usual Vatican attack on humanism and secularism:

“The illusion that moral relativism provides the key for peaceful coexistence is actually the origin of divisions and the denial of the dignity of human beings. Precisely this vision which identifies freedom with relativism or militant agnosticism, and which casts doubt on the possibility of ever knowing the truth, could be an underlying factor in the increased occurrence of those hate incidents and crimes which will be the object of our debate today” and [so on at length](#).

There followed the discussion. I [had prepared a paper](#) but decided instead on a more direct and incisive intervention. I only had three minutes. I said loudly and clearly:

*“Ladies and gentlemen, do you think that people wake up one fine morning and decide to hate Christians – or Catholics rather – out of the blue, for no specific reason? Isn’t it that maybe the Catholic church has done something unpleasant to them, like disseminating hate against the Jews for centuries by calling them perfidious and a deicide people? Or maybe covering up sex abuse on children committed by its clergy? Or claiming huge amounts of public funds and special rights and privileges that are at loggerheads with democracy and the rule of law? Or disparaging and smearing 30 to 50% of the European population made up of non-believers? “*

I then responded bluntly to archbishop Mamberti that his was an attack on pluralism, a pillar of our democratic societies. As for recommendations on how to prevent hate against Christians, I suggested church leaders should use, to say the least, restraint in their public discourse and restraint in claiming all manner of privileges and public funds.

The meeting then broke for lunch and, to my surprise, a number of the most unexpected press their private appreciation: diplomats and officials, representatives of NGOs and even of religious groups. It is clear that not everyone holds the Roman Catholic Church in the same esteem as it does itself!