

# OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2011

1 October 2011

The EHF was represented at the 2011 conference in Warsaw (*left, general view from the NGO seats*) by its President, David Pollock, by its OSCE representatives Hans Christian Cars and (from member organisations) by Vera Pegna of the Unione degli Atei e degli Agnostici Razionalisti (UAAR) and Pierre-Arnaud Perrouty of the Centre d'Action Laïque in Brussels.

We made three interventions in the session on 27 September on “Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief”.

David Pollock spoke on ‘[A Vindication of the Blank Wall](#)’, rejecting the argument seriously advanced in the Lautsi case that “An empty wall in an Italian classroom is no more neutral—indeed, it is far less so—than is a wall with a crucifix upon it”.

Vera Pegna (*right, with David Pollock, at the meeting*) made a [strong intervention](#) questioning the [abusive response](#) to the EHF’s paper on [Religion in Society](#) from the Observatory for Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians. Pierre Arnaud Perrouty’s intervention was on the theme that [blasphemy laws belong in history books](#).

In the session next day on Rule of Law Vera Pegna [criticised the Catholic church](#). She reports: “I did not read extracts from my paper but, in the 4 minutes I had at my disposal, I presented the contents in what, I believe were moderate tones. The Holy See exercised its right to reply (1min), said *it was surprised at UAAR’s attempt to discredit the Holy See whose commitment in OSCE was well-known and appreciated by all member states. UAAR gave a distorted view of freedom of religion or belief. The Lisbon treaty merely lays down the right for churches to participate in the European dialogue. We shall not accept to be silenced. A feeble reply!*”

Vera also reports: “Then I went to the side-event of the [Alliance Defense Fund](#). It was chaired by Roger Kiska, their legal counsel. His introduction concerned the British equality law which is a “tyranny of the majority” since the BA employee [who lost her case in the courts and is taking her case to the European Court of Human Rights] was wearing “a really small cross”, and the Lautsi case where there was a clear political manipulation, otherwise one cannot understand why Soile Lautsi’s husband did not appear, and the attempt to exclude religion from the public square. Then followed a video which was a gross caricature of the Spanish school course on citizenship. The conclusion was that a state should be allowed to have a preferred church and that discrimination against Christians reminded him of the Inquisition. I shan’t bother you with my reply which was far from moderate but supported by some of the 20 or so participants.”

## Side meeting

On 27 September EHF held a well attended side meeting. This was chaired by Hans Christian Cars, whose introductory statement [can be read here](#). (His reflections on

the HDIM can be read in his blog [here](#).) The main business was a speech by EHF President David Pollock on “How can Freedom of Religion and Belief be reconciled with Equality & Non-Discrimination in Democratic Societies?” which [you can read here](#).