

OSCE Mediterranean Conference

28 October 2008

Vera Pegna represented the EHF at the OSCE's 2008 Mediterranean Conference, held in Amman, Jordan, on 27-28 October 2008 and at the Civil Society side-event which preceded it on 26 October.

She took an active part in and out of the formal sessions and her intervention in the plenary session (here below) dealt with the Israel/Palestine conflict from a humanist perspective. (This is also available on the [OSCE website](#).)

At the Civil Society preparatory meeting she added the EHF's name to the following recommendations that now appear in the long list of civil society recommendations to the diplomatic conference:

- on the implementation of humanitarian law so as to mitigate the hardships encountered by women living under occupation;
- on the recognition that women's struggles for their rights contribute to the implementation of the rule of law;
- on the need to take urgent action against individuals and groups who organize unsafe crossings of the Mediterranean which cause every year hundreds of migrants to die at sea.

She also signed a recommendation proposed by the Magenta Foundation and supported by more than a dozen NGOs pointing out the value of the work done by NGOs and calling for better facilities and funding from OSCE.

In addition the EHF submitted its own recommendation:

Whereas the right to live in peace is a fundamental right of the whole of mankind,

Whereas "OSCE states have stressed that issues relating to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are of international concern, as respect for these rights and freedoms constitutes one of the foundations of the international order" (<http://www.osce.org/odihr/13494.html>)

Whereas security in Europe is inseparable from that of the Mediterranean,

The European Humanist Federation recommends that:

- Governments abide by the international laws that govern peaceful coexistence as well as by all other international instruments conducive to reducing violence, inequality and discriminations in the region,
- Governments guarantee the full implementation of the rule of law and respect for the human rights of their people,
- Civil society associations on both sides of the Mediterranean cooperate in raising the awareness of their governments of the need to foster the protection of human rights of populations that live in areas of strife.

Vera Pegna's intervention in the plenary session

(Her original French version is below.)

“It goes without saying that human rights are important.” This statement was heard repeatedly yesterday during the sessions on security and on the environment. You will bear with me if I say I don't agree. No, I don't think that the importance of human rights goes without saying. On the contrary, I think that it must be said and that even to say it is not enough; because human rights need to be constantly monitored, illustrated and documented lest they become the tree that hides the wood. An immense wood made up of men and women in flesh and blood.

As an example I suggest that we look westward where, at a stone's throw, the Palestinian people have been living under occupation for the last forty years as helpless witnesses of their shrinking territory. Let us check and see whether the importance of human rights in the Occupied territories goes without saying and whether the enjoyment of fundamental freedoms is recognized as a potential contribution to conflict prevention.

Do the Palestinians have the right

- ◆ to food security including drinking water in adequate quantity?
- ◆ to an adequate level of health and hygiene which means living in a wholesome area and having access to the essential medical services?
- ◆ to security of employment?
- ◆ to have the right to dispose of land resources and water for their agriculture?
- ◆ to go on living in their home without fear of it being destroyed as a measure of collective punishment? 10,000 homes have already met this fate.
- ◆ to go on living in their familiar landscape of olive groves now that one million olive trees have already been felled? And can they rest assured that no more solid, liquid and gaseous waste – and radioactive waste – will be dumped by the occupier on their land, polluting the air, the soil and the aquifers?

The answer to these questions is obviously no; and if to this we add the fact that nothing at present allows the Palestinians to hope for a better future, then the

question that arises is: wouldn't more respect for the human rights in the occupied territories of Palestine help resolve the Middle Eastern conflict? Especially since OSCE member states have stressed

“that issues relating to human rights, fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law are of international concern, as respect for these rights and freedoms constitutes one of the foundations of the international order”.

Ladies and gentlemen, yesterday much was said about confidence and security building measures. In this spirit I wish to make the following proposal. The criminal codes of most of our countries provide for criminal liability in case of omission to rescue a person in distress. I move that we participants to this Mediterranean conference adopt a resolution which provides for criminal liability in case of omission to rescue a people in distress.

Thank you for your attention.

French original:

Hier lors des sessions sur la sécurité et sur l'environnement il a été déclaré plusieurs reprises que cela va sans dire que les droits de l'homme sont importants. Eh bien non, vous me permettrez de dire que cela ne va pas sans dire. Non seulement faut-il le dire, mais aussi faut-il veiller constamment au respect de ces droits, les illustrer et les documenter si l'on veut éviter qu'ils ne deviennent l'arbre qui cache la forêt. Une forêt immense faite d'hommes et de femmes en chair et en os.

Pour vérifier que le respect des droits fondamentaux soit effectif et, partant, en mesure de contribuer la prévention de conflits, je vous propose de tourner notre regard vers l'ouest où, à quelques kilomètres d'ici, le peuple palestinien vit sous occupation depuis quarante ans et voit son territoire se rétrécir comme peau de chagrin. Faisons un bref état des lieux en matière de sécurité et d'environnement pour voir si et en quelle mesure les droits fondamentaux des palestiniens sont respectés.

Le peuple palestinien

- ◆ a-t-il droit à la sécurité alimentaire y compris la disponibilité d'eau potable en quantité suffisante ?
- ◆ a-t-il droit à la sécurité sanitaire qui signifie vivre dans un lieu salubre et avoir accès aux services sanitaires et médicaux essentiels ?
- ◆ a-t-il droit à la sécurité de l'emploi ?
- ◆ a-t-il le droit de disposer des ressources en terre et en eau pour son agriculture ?
- ◆ a-t-il droit à sa maison, la sécurité de pouvoir y vivre sans craindre qu'elle ne soit détruite sous le coup d'une punition collective ? 10.000 maisons l'ont déjà été à ce titre.
- ◆ en matière d'environnement, est-il assuré de pouvoir vivre dans le milieu qui a toujours été le sien, dans son paysage d'oliviers, sans craindre qu'après le million d'oliviers abattus d'autres le seront encore ? Et sans craindre que les milliers de

tonnes de déchets solides, liquides et gazeux – ainsi que radioactifs – ensevelis par l’occupant ne polluent l’air, la terre et les nappes aquifères ?

Bien entendu la réponse à ces questions est non et, qui plus est, aucune éclaircie n’apparaît à l’horizon qui puisse permettre aux palestiniens de nourrir l’espoir d’un avenir meilleur.

Mesdames, Messieurs, l’OSCE a placé deux principes au cœur de son approche sécuritaire: le principe selon lequel la sécurité commence par la dignité inhérente tout être humain et le principe suivant lequel le respect des droits de l’homme et des libertés fondamentales constitue un des fondements de l’ordre international.

Ces jours-ci il a été souvent question de mesures susceptibles de contribuer à la sécurité et de renforcer la confiance. Eh bien, vu que dans le droit pénal de nos pays l’omission de secours personne en détresse est considéré un délit, je propose aux participants à cette conférence d’examiner l’opportunité que soit considéré un délit l’omission de secours à population en détresse.

Merci de votre attention.