

Zurich, October 29, 2010

Position Paper of the Interreligious Round Table in the Canton of Zürich on the federal vote concerning a general prohibition of minarets

A plea against the constitutionally established discrimination of Muslims

I

Every Swiss person has the constitutional right to vote according to his or her best knowledge and convictions, for or against any national initiative. The signers of this statement therefore respect the personal right to make decisions entailed in this vote.

However, we would appeal to all citizens with voting rights to consider carefully the implications that would result if this initiative were to pass. The arbitrary exclusion of a religious community from the basic rights of a democratic society is an act of discrimination that carries unforeseeable consequences. The public's attempt to come to terms with Islam is already fraught with sweeping allegations and broad suspicions. This is humiliating for the Muslims who live among us. To adopt the minaret initiative would lead to an even harsher atmosphere that would strain and disrupt religious freedom.

II

Freedom of press belongs to the freedom of opinion and of speech – and this freedom belongs to the important achievements of modernity. It includes the basic freedom of speaking one's own mind without the fear of reprisal. The signers of this statement endorse this important basic right. However, this is not an absolute right but one that must be kept in balance with other values and rights. The violation of the integrity and dignity of individuals, ethnic groups or entire religious communities is an infringement of the proper boundaries of freedom of speech.

We appeal to all persons in positions of responsibility in politics, the media and advertising to pay more careful attention to basic ethical values and political guidelines and to abstain in the future from communication of a polemical and incendiary nature. Freedom of speech cannot be taken as a license for discriminatory statements.

III

Another right that belongs to a free society is the right to criticize religious institutions and convictions. A look at history shows us that religious communities have done a great deal of good – but also a great deal of harm. One finds in every religious community wisdom and delusion, zeal that is right and zeal that is misguided, things that inspire and things that must be questioned.

For this reason we appeal to the members of all religious communities not to be too quick to take criticism of their own religion as an insult. Should the critique of an outsider prove unqualified or malicious, it must be rejected decisively. Sometimes, however, it is more helpful to take outside criticism as an opportunity to question oneself.

IV

Another characteristic of an open society is the public exchange of conflicting opinions. Clashes between differing interests, positions and goals are features of a vibrant democracy. However, we are deeply concerned by the current tenor of discussion about the minaret initiative.

Thus, we appeal to everyone involved to strive to protect and nurture the freedom of religion for all people and to resist the discrimination of any religious community.

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