

OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Prepared Statement of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against
Christians in Europe
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Over the last eight years, the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians has documented over 1,600 incidents of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in the region west of Vienna. In a fragmented landscape of social hostility, negative stereotyping, vandalism, hate incidents and more or less subtle government restrictions, a concerning pattern becomes visible.

We are very grateful to OSCE and the Chairmanship-in-Office for the seriousness with which the problem of intolerance and discrimination against Christians is being addressed. We applaud OSCE for seeking answers in numerous meetings and documents in which intolerance against Christians was specifically targeted.

We have five concrete recommendations to contribute to the promising work already being done:

First, we respectfully remind participating states to combat underreporting by collecting disaggregated data on hate crimes against Christians. For example, in some countries, vandalism against a Christian church is merely reported as vandalism against a public building.

Secondly, we urge participating states to guarantee freedom of conscience and the right to exercise this freedom through conscientious objection, not only in relation to compulsory military service, but also in relation to the provision of services and performance of morally sensitive activities.

Thirdly, we reiterate our previous 2014 and 2015 recommendations to OSCE to develop materials on how to combat intolerance against Christians and to disseminate them through the OSCE region. Manuals on how to combat anti-Semitism and discrimination against Muslims have previously been developed.

According to the Open Doors World Watch List, 2015 was the worst year in modern history for the persecution of Christians. The European Parliament, the United States Department of State, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Pope Francis and Cyril, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and many political and faith leaders have all labeled the systematic targeting and killing of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria as genocide.

With this, a new challenge for participating states has emerged: the protection of the most vulnerable asylum seekers – Christians fleeing persecution and genocide. After they have risked their lives to reach safety, they have been met with violence, threats, and discrimination on the basis of their Christian faith at the hands of fellow migrants and, in some cases, the guards in refugee camps.

We urge participating states to recognize and address the special problem of Christian refugees, with the understanding that all refugees deserve protection, but that religious and ethnic conflicts do not disappear as people cross borders.

Further, given that many Christians and other religious minorities do not begin their perilous journeys to Europe through UNHCR refugee camps because of harassment and bullying, we urge participating states to make special efforts to bring Christian refugees and internally displaced persons to safety through channels beyond the UNHCR camps.

Finally, light of the continuing genocide of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria, combating persecution of Christians outside the OSCE area must become a priority of the foreign secretaries of participating states in their foreign policy.

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