

OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Working Session 11: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination I

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Statement of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians by Ellen Fantini, Executive Director

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.

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, 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.

We offer the following concrete recommendations to participating states:

- Provide disaggregated data on hate crimes, paying due attention to hate crimes against Christians in all areas, including where they are majority.
- Register religious affiliation of refugees and asylum seekers at reception centres.
- Declare the systematic targeting and killing of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria genocide.
- Recognise the special status of Christians and other religious minorities, and receive refugees and asylum seekers from alternate channels, instead of solely from UNHCR camps.
- Train and educate police, social welfare office staff, and accommodation security on the topic of religiously-motivated conflict.
- Improve the balance in ethnic/religious composition of refugees, as well as staff, security, and translators in asylum centres, and remove offending staff in incidents of religiously-motivated bias or violence.
- Permit anonymous reporting of religiously-motivated incidents, protect whistle-blowers, remove perpetrators from accommodations, and deport violent offenders.
- Support private accommodations for Christians. As a last resort or temporary measure, in the absence of the above-mentioned protections, establish separate accommodations for Christian refugees.
- Compile and publish a national report on hate crimes, including against Christians.
- Develop training programs on hate crimes for public officials and law enforcement agencies operating at local level.
- Adopt national action plans in order to prevent and effectively respond to hate crimes.

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 be a priority of the foreign secretaries of participating states.

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