

# OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

**Intervention on behalf of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians by Barbara Vittucci**

**HDIM 2014, September 30, Working Session 13, 3 pm.**

The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians documented over 1400 incidents of intolerance and discrimination against Christians, focusing on West of Vienna in the past seven years. 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 ODIHR for the seriousness with which the problem of intolerance and discrimination against Christians is handled. We applaud OSCE for seeking answers in numerous meetings and documents in which intolerance against Christians was specifically targeted.<sup>1</sup> We also would like to congratulate ODIHR to the annual hate crimes report to which we gratefully contribute the results of our research every year.

## **Recommendations:**

To improve what is already on a good path, please allow me to make five recommendations:

**First, we recommend to participating states** to combat underreporting by collecting disaggregated data on hate crimes against Christians. In some countries, vandalism against a Christian site is only listed as vandalism against a public building.

**Secondly, we recommend to participating states** to mind the problem of „reverse discrimination“, or unintended discrimination, which could be caused as a side effect of anti-discrimination policies. Excessive regulation of private conduct with regard to discrimination on the grounds of religion or sexual orientation may cause conscience problems and discrimination of Christians. An example of such over-boarding legislation is the draft EU - fifth equal treatment directive.

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<sup>1</sup> June 26-27, 2012, OSCE/ODIHR on the role of civil society in combating Hate Crimes against Christians; September 12, 2011, OSCE High-Level Meeting on Preventing and Responding to Hate Incidents and Crimes against Christians; July 2011: OSCE Parliamentary Assembly urges states to combat intolerance and discrimination against Christians in the West; March 4, 2009: OSCE Round Table in Vienna on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians; 2005, 2006 and 2007: the Ministerial Council of OSCE emphasizes to combat intolerance against religion, including Christianity.

**Thirdly, we recommend to ODIHR** to reconsider their definition of anti-religious hate. For example, violence against a Christian due to him being a Christian is considered a hate crime. Violence against a pro-life-protestor however, is not seen as an anti-Christian incident, because, as ODIHR would say, the attacker does not hate Christianity as such, but only the pro-life position.

We argue however, that the pro life conviction is intrinsically part of Christianity and even if an attacker might be indifferent to other aspects of Christianity, if hatred of one aspect leads him to attack a peaceful protestor, it should be sufficient to call this an anti-Christian incident.

**Fourthly, we recommend to OSCE** to develop materials on how to combat intolerance against Christians and to disseminate this through the OSCE region. A manual on how to combat intolerance through education, for example, exists currently only with regard to Muslims, not with regard to Christians.

**Ladies and Gentlemen, let me conclude with a fifth recommendation:** In the light of recent global developments, combating persecution of Christians outside the OSCE area must become a priority of the **foreign secretaries of participating states** in their foreign policy.

This intervention is available in writing at the information tables and online.

Thank you for your attention.

**Contact information:**

Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians

Möllwaldplatz 5, A-1040 Vienna

Tel: +43 / 1 / 274 98 98

[observatory@IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu](mailto:observatory@IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu)

[www.IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu](http://www.IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu)

Twitter: OIDACEurope, Facebook: OIDACEurope