

# CESNUR Center for Studies on New Religions



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## **OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

Working session 13: Tolerance and non-discrimination II, including:–Combating racism, xenophobia, and discrimination–Combating anti-Semitism and intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions

Statement by Prof Massimo Introvigne, Managing Director, CESNUR

### **Religion-Based Asylum Claims by Christian Chinese Refugees in Italy**

The religious persecution in China has caused many believers to become refugees, with increasing numbers seeking asylum in various democratic nations. In recent years, Italy has become one of the main destinations for Chinese believers escaping persecution in their country. Although there are individual cases of Muslim Uyghurs and ethnic Kazakhs, and Tibetan Buddhists, seeking asylum in Italy from China, most requests concern Christians. Some come from a variety of Protestant House Churches. Other from the Shouters, a family of Chinese Christian movements. However, the overwhelming majority of religion-based asylum claims in Italy concerns members of The Church of Almighty God (CAG), a Christian new religious movement severely persecuted in China since its foundation in 1991.

We have heard often in this room criticism of participating states for their reluctance to understand the situation of refugees from China. Only last year, a CAG member living in Italy criticized Italian authorities here for their handling of CAG refugee cases.

I believe, however, that positive developments should also be reported in this meeting, as they can be regarded as best practices that may inspire other participating states.

Italian authorities did indeed realize that many administrative and legal decisions concerning CAG refugees derived from incorrect information, or worse from fake news spread on the Internet by Chinese propaganda. The National Commission for

the Right to Asylum at the Ministry of Internal Affairs took three commendable initiatives to remedy this situation. First, it distributed to all territorial commissions dealing with refugees a brochure with updated information on the CAG. Second, it included lessons on China and CAG in the courses training new members of the same commissions. Third, it produced in March and July 2019 two new Country of Origin Information (COI) documents with reliable information on CAG and its persecution in China, posted on the European Asylum Support Office's COI data base.

As a result of these measures, the percentage of decisions granting asylum to CAG members has increased in recent months.

Problems remain in Italy, as elsewhere. Some local decisions unfortunately ignore the national documents, and the overall percentage of asylum requests granted remains too low. The general attitude of the public opinion and of some political parties is hostile to refugees in general. We would like, however, to applaud the positive efforts of the Italian authorities, and encourage them to continue in this valuable enterprise.