

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe / Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

BARNABAS FUND BRIEFING FOR OSCE/ODIHR SPEECH

WRITTEN TEXT: STATEMENT ON REFUGEE SITUATION IN MIDDLE EAST

OSCE participating States have a duty, in addressing the current crisis in the Middle East and Europe, to ensure the protection of human rights and dignity of migrants.

However Barnabas Fund would stress that this concern for human rights needs to go right back to the source situation of those fleeing for their lives from conflict and persecution, leaving homes and historic communities, and heading for Europe. The problem is not just conflict and violence, but also the sectarian targeting of particular groups and especially minority religious groups.

In the conflict between political groups in Syria and Iraq, and between Sunni and Shia, the fate of defenseless minorities should draw particular attention. Major groups (Sunni Arabs, Alawite/Shia Arabs, Kurds) have significant areas they control in the region, economic, political and military power, and significant outside support from regional and global powers. Christians, Druze, Yazidi and Shabak minorities have none of these, and no safe havens in the region. European authorities need to recognize that among the vulnerable, these communities are particularly vulnerable and in need of support.

For Middle eastern Christians it is bitterly ironic that 2015 marks the 100th anniversary of the peak of the Armenian and Assyrian genocides, which saw the killing of several million unarmed civilians and the elimination of vast sections of these ancient Christian communities. Christians made up over 20% of the population of the Middle East in 1900; they represent about 5% of the population today.

It was no more than the truth when the United Nations Security Council cited genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes against minorities in its 27 March 2015 debate¹ on Syria. Likewise the Special Adviser to the UN Secretary-General on the Prevention of Genocide stated in June 2015² the UN's concern about intentional genocidal policies by Islamic State and others against minorities especially Christians and Alawites. The European Parliament has voiced its concern in resolutions on the issue of persecution against Christians. The situation is so serious that Muslim leaders in Lebanon have also spoken out about the persecution of Christians in the Middle East.³

¹ <http://www.un.org/press/en/2015/sgsm16625.doc.htm>

² <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16075&LangID=E#sthash.966oGiBA.dpuf>

³ <http://beforeitsnews.com/religion/2015/06/muslim-leaders-in-lebanon-condemn-persecution-of-christians-in-the-middle-east-2491828.html>

Under Article 1 of the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide, contracting states have a general duty where they “undertake to prevent and to punish” the crime under international law of genocide. However this is being ignored in the case of Iraq and Syria, despite UN recognition that the situation is appalling and includes both explicit intent by Islamic State and others to commit genocidal crimes by the advocacy of racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to violence against minorities and the egregious acts of genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity that target minority groups on the basis of their religious or ethnic identity.

The third pillar of the international community’s responsibility to protect, in the Outcome Document of the 2005 United Nations World Summit, states

The international community has a responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other means to protect populations from these crimes. If a State is manifestly failing to protect its populations, the international community must be prepared to take collective action to protect populations, in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations.

Therefore we call upon European authorities to protect and aid minority populations, and to provide aid and support to Syrian and Iraqi minorities in just proportion to their numbers in the general population. This should be an explicit and verifiable policy. European states should likewise ensure that humanitarian asylum for refugees is likewise provided with an explicit and verifiable policy that vulnerable religious/ethnic groups receive a fair quota of places. Ad hoc policies will not achieve the care for the most vulnerable that states avow; UK policy, for example, of taking in refugees from camps in the Middle East will discriminate against Christians and other members of minority groups who do not go to camps for real fear of persecution from majority population groups within the camps.

Barnabas Fund would like to pay tribute to the Polish government whose provision of humanitarian visas has allowed phase one of our Operation Safe Havens program to bring 157 vulnerable Syrians out of danger to a new life in Europe. We pray that negotiations with other governments will lead to similar cooperative partnerships.

There are civil society groups and individuals across Europe willing to assist states in resettlement of refugees, but these groups need the cooperation of governments to work together to identify the most vulnerable, organise transport and provide long-term care and support in the host countries. Barnabas Fund and others are ready and willing, if governments do their part and accept partnership offers. We would refer you to the joint statement released on Wednesday 23 September by Muslim Aid and Barnabas Fund;

<https://barnabasfund.org/news/Barnabas-reaches-out-to-Muslims-to-secure-a-place-in-the-UK-for-Christians-in-Syrian-rescue-bid>