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DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

ENGLISH only

Statement

**In response to Address by the Personal Representative of the OSCE
Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination,
also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members
of other Religions; and the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-
in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism**

**delivered by Ambassador Arman Kirakossian at the 1166th Meeting of the OSCE
Permanent Council**

November 30, 2017

Mr. Chairman,

We would like to warmly welcome Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office Professor Ingeborg Gabriel and Rabbi Andrew Baker and thank them for presenting their previous activities and highlighting existing issues of intolerance and discrimination targeting Christians and Jews.

Christian communities and members of other religions face number of challenges in the OSCE area and wide Mediterranean region, such as identity based violence, mass-atrocities, destruction and illegal expropriation of churches, cemeteries and religious symbols, dissemination of hatred through media and education. International community has recognized genocidal nature of violence targeting certain religious groups including Yazidis. Violence against Christians and members of other religious groups constitutes security threat for the OSCE.

It is particularly worrying that very often violence against members of religious groups is committed in the name of religion. We should strongly condemn any misuse of religion including religious solidarity in the violent purposes. By the same token attempts to introduce religious dimension to conflicts deepens dividing lines, nurtures hatred and further complicates their resolution.

We believe that tolerance and non-discrimination is possible only in the framework of overall protection of human rights. Fundamental freedoms, including freedoms of expression peaceful assembly and association shape the necessary environment for protection of the members of religious groups. Promotion of peace and security is impossible without ensuring human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

Mr. Chairman,

Armenia is a staunch advocate of protection of religious groups from intolerance discrimination and hate crimes. We have actively contributed to the efforts of

international community to counter hate crimes on religious grounds in different international fora, including the UN and the UN Human Rights Council and Council of Europe.

We thank distinguished Professor Gabriel for referring to the Conference “Preventing and Countering Hate Crimes against Christians and Members of other Religious Groups - Perspectives from the OSCE and beyond”, held in Yerevan on November 22. Armenia was pleased to host this OSCE Chairmanship and ODIHR Conference and we thank the Austrian Chairmanship and ODIHR for its excellent organization and you, Professor Gabriel, for your active participation.

The Conference brought together high level representatives of governments and parliaments of the OSCE participating States, members of religious communities, civil society and academia. Participants exchanged views and best practices on implementation of relevant OSCE commitments and discussed possible avenues of streamlining our joint efforts through raising awareness, promoting education and remembrance, strengthening legislation, data collection, building the capacity of actors in criminal justice systems, assisting civil society and religious communities.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Edward Nalbandian in his welcoming remarks among other issues specifically focused on the existential threats, which Christians and Yazidis face in the region of Middle East and the national efforts of Armenia to alleviate the suffering of religious and ethnic groups.

Number of useful recommendations were made on how to further streamline the activities of the participating States, the OSCE, in particular the ODIHR in identifying and responding to bias-motivated hate crimes and incidents targeting Christians and members of other religious groups. We hope these recommendations will be considered by the OSCE and its institutions in their further activities.

In conclusion, I would like to thank again Professor Gabriel and Rabbi Baker and wish them all success in their future activities.

Thank you.