



Statement of Delegation of Hungary

Working session 6: Fundamental freedoms I, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

**HDIM, 13. September 2018.
Warsaw**

Mr./Madame Moderator,

The Hungarian Government uses all available means to promote the fulfilment of the freedom of religion and belief and attaches great importance to the protection of the religious minorities, domestically and internationally, with special regard to crisis areas. The Hungarian response to migration and other humanitarian crises is grounded in the principle of helping the communities on the spot. In our view the strengthening of the freedom of religion provides one of the basic requirements for the survival and peaceful recruitment of the communities living in crisis zones. Therefore, one of our main objectives is to support persecuted religious communities, with special respect to Christians suffering discrimination in many countries of the world. The recognition that being a Christian is the most dangerous affiliation in the world should be emphasized in international discourse as current trends show the intensification of this persecution, discrimination. Moreover, Christians are among the most vulnerable groups in several regions, hence particular attention needs to be paid to their survival. And it is also important to highlight that while Hungary is a secular state but it is proud of its Christian cultural roots.

The Government of Hungary was the first to establish a special administrative unit dedicated to the support of Christians persecuted because of their religion and, what is more important, it also launched a specific humanitarian program with the same purpose under the name 'Hungary Helps'. The support provided by us can be sorted into three project types. An important element of our work is disbursing humanitarian emergency relief which is to support survival, to relieve refugees and IDPs who stayed in the crisis regions till the possibility of return to their homeland. We have ongoing projects in several countries in the Middle-East (e.g. Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq) for the distressed people, for persecuted Christians explicitly, but not exclusively. For example, all deprived persons without discrimination can benefit from the pharmaceutical aid provided by the Hungary Helps program for the Saint Joseph Hospital of Erbil serving IDPs in Northern Iraq. Another significant program package includes reconstruction projects providing assistance not only in the Middle-East but for example in the Northern Nigerian regions affected by Boko Haram. Of these projects, the completion of the reconstruction of the Christian village Telsqof in Iraq in the frame of Hungary Helps Program is exemplary, providing help in a cost-efficient way and enabling the locals to return to their ancestral homelands after having been exiled by ISIS. The third



important pillar of the Hungarian approach looks into a more distant future as the Hungarian Government launched a scholarship program for persecuted, discriminated and threatened young Christians with the objective of providing these young people who are often expelled from higher education in their native country with the opportunity of pursuing higher education studies in Hungary.

The parliamentary resolution of the National Assembly of Hungary launching the program also stipulates the international advocacy, the raising of political and public awareness of the existence and severity of the persecution of Christians in the 21st century. In addition to being active in international organizations and having an intensive relationship with international faith-based charity organizations, we also organize international conferences. In October 2017, we held the first world consultation on Christian persecution in Budapest with 450 participants including politicians, the leaders of eastern churches and also the representatives of numerous NGOs. Mr. Salvatore Martinez – who was invited by the current Italian Presidency to be the Personal Representative on Combatting Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of other Religions – was also among the participants. Based on the discussions at the US State Department initiated and hosted Ministerial Conference on Religious Freedom held in July 2018 and on the recommendations of the State Department, the Government of Hungary is planning to organize a subsequent meeting next year.

A novel feature of the Hungarian program is the direct support for the vulnerable communities suffering from religious persecution; listening to them in need and responding to their requests. We engage into direct talks with the local Church leaders bearing responsibility for the fate of their communities and having their confidence based on the centuries-long history, so creating a guarantee for the completion of the programs.

Targeting permanent peace and stability the legal accountability, the naming of the perpetrators is crucial. In 2016 the National Assembly of Hungary condemned the atrocities committed against religious minorities by the Islamic State recognizing as genocide in a resolution unanimously accepted by all five parties of the Hungarian Parliament and called upon the governments of the world to stand up for the protection of the minorities of the Middle East and Africa.

I thank you.