

# OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

## Working Session 8: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

HDIM 2017, Warsaw, September 14, 2017

Statement of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians by  
Ellen Fantini, Executive Director

The annotated agenda for this session notes the OSCE/ODIHR's continued concern about the existence of gaps in reported official data on hate crimes. It praises civil society as a key partner in reporting hate crimes and asks how OSCE/ODIHR can better support civil society's efforts.

The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe reported **191 hate crimes against Christians in 16 European countries** to the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for inclusion in its 2016 hate crimes report.

Of the hate incidents reported by the Observatory, the majority were acts of vandalism or destruction at places of worship. As in 2015, there continued to be abuse and harassment of Christians in refugee accommodations. Christmas displays, Christian schools and cemeteries were also frequent targets of hate incidents.

Yesterday, civil society organizations that submit hate crime data were given an opportunity to review ODIHR's compilation of the data for 2016.

Upon review, the Observatory makes the following observations:

- 1) In the official police data, it appears that **no country reported hate crimes against Christians**, despite many reporting or disaggregating data in other categories such as anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, and the like. This is despite nearly every case submitted by the Observatory having been investigated by police.
- 2) Of the 191 hate crimes against Christians in 16 countries reported by the Observatory, **only 38 of those cases** were included in ODIHR's data, and those were only in Spain. Cases from other capable organizations, particularly Jehovah's Witnesses, were routinely cited. For years, along with the Holy See, the Observatory has been one of the primary sources of information to ODIHR on hate crimes against Christians in Europe. I also note with concern the absence of

any cases reported by the Holy See, which routinely submits comprehensive hate crime data.

- 3) While we assume that not including the majority of the Observatory's cases was a simple oversight, it illustrates a **concrete example** of how the well-resourced OSCE/ODIHR can support under-resourced civil society groups by making sure the hate crime team takes extra care not to exclude data. Civil society groups are already doing the heavy lifting by disaggregating data, despite repeated commitments from Participating States to do so.
- 4) I will provide a few examples of clear hate crimes against Christians that are currently missing in the ODIHR report:

### **France**

The July 26<sup>th</sup> **murder** of Father Jacques Hamel, 84, who died after his throat was slit during an attack on the church in Saint-Etienne-du-Rouvray by two armed men. They entered the building during Mass, and took the priest and a number of other people, including two nuns, hostage. ISIS reportedly claimed the attack was carried out by two "soldiers" from the group, one of whom was reportedly known to French intelligence services.

### **Germany**

The premeditated murder of a Christian woman in August 2016 at the hands of her self-proclaimed "anti-theist" flat mate was one of **31 hate incidents reported from Germany**. "Daniel E." admitted killing her because of his hatred of all religion. The judge said, "He killed her as a representative of her religion because he could not kill all believers." He was sentenced to life in prison in January 2017.

There were multiple attacks on Christian refugees and converts, as well as against members of the clergy. None were included in the ODIHR data.

### **Italy**

The majority of the **14 hate incidents against Christians in Italy**, as reported by the Observatory, involved damage to property and theft. None were reported by ODIHR. In one striking incident, police arrested a 39-year-old Ghanaian man suspected of attacking several churches in Rome over the previous two days in early October. According to reports, on the evening of September 30<sup>th</sup>, a man damaged a statue in the church of San Martino ai Monti and fled. Shortly afterwards, the same person entered the Basilica of Santa Prassede and "smash[ed] everything he found, especially statues and candlesticks, right before a group of parishioners who were quite scared. The two devotional statues of Saint Anthony of Padua and Saint Prassede were heavily damaged." Later, he is alleged to have entered the Church of San Martino ai Monti, where he smashed a devotional statue of the Madonna and Child. On the morning of October 1<sup>st</sup>, two further attacks occurred in the Basilicas of San Giovanni de' Fiorentini and San Vitale. Statues,

candlesticks, crucifixes were smashed. According to a witness, "the perpetrator said: "it was not right that we worshipped in this way."

### **Austria**

Of the **6 incidents in Austria**, half related to incidents and patterns of abuse of Christians in refugee accommodations. In December, a 22-year-old man from Afghanistan stabbed a Christian woman when he heard her reading from the Bible at a refugee accommodation in Upper Austria. Her alleged attacker was apparently offended by the fact that the woman had been invited by Christian residents of the property for a Bible study. According to reports, the 22-year-old stormed into the kitchen where the woman was standing, grabbed a butter knife, and tried to plunge it into her upper body. The 50-year-old victim escaped serious injury because her thick winter coat protected her, but she did injure her ear when she fell backwards from the force of the man's violent blows. Earlier in the year, Elmar Kuhn, General Secretary of Christian Solidarity International Austria, warned said the state seemed to be unable and unwilling to put an end to threats and harassment against Christians in refugee centers in Austria.

### **Belgium**

In **Belgium, two of the four incidents** were perpetrated by radical Islamists. In August, Souhaib Amaouch, the 17 year old son of radical imam El Alami Amaouch, was filmed declaring in Arabic, "Oh Allah, destroy the odious Christians. Oh Allah kill them all." The video shown on a French website depicts the teen saying, "Don't spare any of them." He was arrested in Verviers along with his parents on August 21st. A judge ordered him to be placed for three months in a youth protection institution.

### **United Kingdom**

In the **United Kingdom, there were three hate incidents** reported by the Observatory. In one, a Christian family was forced to flee their home under armed police guard amid fears for their safety after suffering what they say is eight years of persecution for converting from Islam to Christianity. Nissar Hussain left Islam in 1996 and has since faced aggressive behavior and even violence from members of the Muslim community in Bradford, where he lived. The Hussains say police told them there was a credible threat to their lives. This was the second time the Hussains have had to move to flee harassment and assaults.

### **Not a Complete Picture of the Situation for Christians in Europe**

The number of hate incidents reported to the OSCE/ODIHR does not always provide a complete picture of the situation for Christians in Europe. While we commend the OSCE/ODIHR for gathering data from civil society organizations such as the Observatory, we note that incidents that qualify for inclusion in the hate crime report constitute a **small fraction** of the intolerance, discrimination, and legal restrictions Christians face in some countries.

Across Europe Christians have been fired, sued, and even arrested for exercising their freedom of expression or conscience. Christian-run businesses have been ruined financially, Christian student groups have been silenced, and Christian symbols and celebrations have been removed from the public square. Christians and non-Christians should be equally concerned with the continuing infringement on their fellow citizens' rights.

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