



OSCE HDIM WS 14

Fundamental Freedoms II, including freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) - a non-governmental organisation that advocates for the freedom of religion or belief for people of all faiths or none - echoes the 2013 OSCE Kyiv Ministerial Council Decision on the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, that calls upon OSCE participating States to: “[r]efrain from imposing restrictions inconsistent with OSCE commitments and international obligations on the practice of religion or belief by individuals and religious communities.”

In the case of Turkey, whilst the Turkish Constitution provides for limited freedom of religion, worship and the private expression of religious ideas, and whilst Turkey has shown some positive signs of progress in this area, notable tensions continue to exist between the state’s officially secular position and its Sunni Muslim identity. Religious minorities - in particular Alevi Muslims, Christians and converts from Sunni Islam to a minority religion - continue to face hostility and discrimination both from the state and at a societal level.

At the state level, the Turkish Presidency of Religious Affairs (the Diyanet), which is attached to the Office of the Prime Minister, and which has a larger budget than the justice ministry, continues to control and financially privilege Sunni Islam, whose mosques, projects and imams receive funds that are unavailable to religious minorities. The February 2011 decree excludes the restitution of Alevi property. Indeed, the Alevis continue to lose property and even the decreed return of buildings confiscated by the state from other religious groups remains problematic. Constraints also remain in place in the areas of: i) education, as highlighted in the latest report of the *Norwegian Helsinki Committee: Turkey Freedom of Belief Initiative*; ii) identity cards – whereby Bahai’s and Alevis are not permitted to state their actual religion. Because of the range of situations in which Turks are asked to produce an ID card, leaving this space blank opens these citizens up to further discrimination; iii) and the registration of minority religions’ places of worship. In this vein, CSW welcomes ODIHR’s joint guidelines with the Venice Commission on the *Legal Personality of Religious or Belief Communities*.

CSW recommends that Turkey take the necessary measures to:

- Remove all reservations to international human rights treaties and uphold the rights outlined in the international statutes to which it is party;
- Ensure that all belief groups and their institutions can obtain legal personality and exercise their internationally established rights;
- Ensure that the Turkish state, including the Diyanet, acts in a non-discriminatory manner in accordance with Turkey's international human rights commitments on freedom of religion or belief;
- Remove the religion section on identity cards;
- Enable the establishment of clerical and theological institutions for all religions;

- Effectively prosecute those who attack places of worship or individuals due to their religion or belief and provide the victims of rights violations with reparations;
- Educate all public officials, including those charged with law enforcement in their duty to protect the rights of religious minorities in a manner consistent with the international human rights framework on freedom of religion or belief;
- Monitor the implementation of the decree returning confiscated properties to minority communities, to ensure that the General Foundations Board of Turkey processes each application for return of assets quickly and fairly.

CSW further calls on OSCE participating States and institutions:

- To encourage and assist the Turkish authorities in promoting greater interfaith harmony and understanding in accordance with the accepted international human rights standards on freedom of religion or belief.