

OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Working Session 12: Fundamental Freedoms I

HDIM 2016, Warsaw, September 27, 2016

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

Over the last eight years, the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians has documented over 1,600 incidents of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in the region west of Vienna. In a fragmented landscape of social hostility, negative stereotyping, vandalism, hate incidents and more or less subtle government restrictions, a concerning pattern becomes visible.

We are very grateful to OSCE and the Chairmanship-in-Office for the seriousness with which the problem of intolerance and discrimination against Christians is being addressed. We applaud OSCE for seeking answers in numerous meetings and documents in which intolerance against Christians was specifically targeted.

We have five concrete recommendations to contribute to the promising work already being done:

First, we respectfully remind participating states to combat underreporting by collecting disaggregated data on hate crimes against Christians. For example, in some countries, vandalism against Christian churches continues to be merely reported as vandalism against a public building.

Secondly, we urge participating states to guarantee freedom of conscience and the right to exercise this freedom through conscientious objection, not only in relation to compulsory military service, but also in relation to the provision of services and performance of morally sensitive activities.

Thirdly, we reiterate our previous 2014 and 2015 recommendations to OSCE to develop materials on how to combat intolerance against Christians and to disseminate them through the OSCE region. Manuals on how to combat anti-Semitism and discrimination against Muslims have previously been developed.

According to the Open Doors World Watch List, 2015 was the worst year in modern history for the persecution of Christians. The European Parliament, the United

States Department of State, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Pope Francis and Cyril, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, and many political and faith leaders have all labeled the systematic targeting and killing of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria as genocide.

With this, a new challenge for participating states has emerged: the protection of the most vulnerable asylum seekers – Christians fleeing persecution and genocide. After they have risked their lives to reach safety, they have been met with violence, threats, and discrimination on the basis of their Christian faith at the hands of fellow migrants and, in some cases, the guards in refugee camps.

We urge participating states to recognize and address the special problem of Christian refugees, with the understanding that all refugees deserve protection, but that religious and ethnic conflicts do not disappear as people cross borders. Further, given that many Christians and other religious minorities do not begin their perilous journeys to Europe through UNHCR refugee camps because of harassment and bullying, we urge participating states to make special efforts to bring Christian refugees and internally displaced persons to safety through channels beyond the UNHCR camps.

Finally, light of the continuing genocide of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria, combating persecution of Christians outside the OSCE area must be a priority of the foreign secretaries of participating states in their foreign policy.

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OSCE/ODHIR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, 27 September, 2016: Warsaw, Poland

Recommendations

Participating States are urged to:

- Consult with religious communities in order to adopt anti-discrimination laws that do not violate the autonomy and self-organization of the religious communities.
- Guarantee freedom of conscience and the right to exercise this freedom through conscientious objection, not only to compulsory military service but also in the performance of other morally sensitive activities.
- Guarantee the right to wear religious symbols and attire in public spaces, which is encompassed by freedom of religion or belief.
- Guarantee the right of parents to direct the education and upbringing of their children.
- Foster the participation of religious communities in public life and welcome the interventions of religious leaders in the public debate.

The OSCE/ODIHR is called upon to:

- Raise awareness about the positive contribution of religions to our democratic societies.
- Develop guidelines for educators on countering intolerance and discrimination against Christians.
- Develop and strengthen capacity-building activities for the protection of all religious properties, including Christian sites.
- Train law enforcement agencies, media, and civil society to recognise and report hate crimes perpetrated against majority groups.

The OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media is called upon to:

- Provide, in close cooperation with the OSCE-ODIHR and the Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, guidelines for voluntary professional standards and self-regulation of the media aimed to (i) promote knowledge and understanding of religions, (ii) give a fair and accurate portrayals of religious beliefs, and (iii) ensure that members of religious communities are given the chance to express their own views in the media.

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