

STATEMENT FROM BARNABAS FUND

September 2017

TREATMENT OF CHRISTIANS AND OTHER MINORITIES

Barnabas Fund remains concerned about the treatment of Christian refugees in OSCE countries and the apparent discrimination in certain contexts. There is almost an official policy to ignore the context of sectarian violence being meted out to Christians and other minorities, for example Yazidis, in parts of the Middle East, especially at the hands of Islamic State and other Islamist armed groups.

The extremely low numbers of religious minorities given asylum in some countries is a growing concern. U.S. official figures show that Christians made up less than 1% of Syrians given asylum in the past couple of years, even though they represent about 10% of the Syrian population. This is despite general recognition that Christians are again facing genocide in some areas of the Middle East.

A Freedom of Information Act request in the UK, FOI 41879, shows that Syrian Christians made up only 1.54% of the 4,175 Syrians resettled under the Vulnerable Persons Scheme between September 2015 and September 2016. There were also just 3 Druze and 18 Yazidis.

These macro official figures parallel a failure to take seriously individual asylum cases. Recently Sweden has faced justified criticism for its intention to return well-known Iranian actress Aideen Strandsson to Iran, despite the clear dangers she would face there as a convert from Islam and the fact that this violates the UN Refugee Convention.

The experience inside Europe for refugees from minority groups is often poor, with significant levels of violence, intimidation and exploitation coming from other refugees. Mistreatment can even come from officials or staff from other ethnicities or religions. It should not be surprising that sectarian conflict inside one country could have an influence among refugee populations, but authorities continue to house Christians and other minorities with people from groups that persecute them, with the inevitable consequences. There appears to be some recognition of the problems but little willingness to do anything about it.

Consequently Barnabas Fund requests OSCE countries to:

1. Carry out a needs assessment of the specific issues faced by religious minorities such as Christians and Yazidis within refugee populations in order to ensure that it adequately meets its "duty to protect".
2. Develop a specific strategy to protect religious minorities who are refugees in their country from religiously motivated violence from other refugees.

<http://www.welt.de/politik/deutschland/article146919471/Islamisten-bedrohen-Christen-in-Fluechtlingsheimen.html>

<http://www.catholicherald.co.uk/news/2015/09/29/christian-and-muslim-refugees-should-be-separated-says-german-police-chief/>

<http://www.fairobserver.com/region/europe/refugees-persecuted-in-europe-12901/>

<http://www.secularism.org.uk/blog/2015/09/sectarianism-in-modern-britain>

http://iinanews.org/page/public/news_details.aspx?id=98412&NL=True#

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