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DELEGATION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ARMENIA
ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE

Statement of the Delegation of Armenia
At the High level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
Second Session: Combating ignorance and discrimination against Christian and members
of other religions
Tirana, May 21, 2013

Madam Moderator,

I would like to thank our distinguished panelists for their interesting presentations and particularly for the reference made to 1700 years of anniversary of Milan Edict which not only Christianize Europe but established origins of freedom of religion and conscious.

Let me build on this historic perspective by highlighting the role of the protection of Christian communities in establishing international human rights law. Here it should be recalled that the interference of the European Powers throughout the 19th century aimed at improving the security situation of the Christian communities contributed towards setting up the universal norm of international responsibility for human rights protection, a principle that is nowadays fully enshrined in our common OSCE commitments and most notably in Astana commemorative declaration.

Our common determination to defend individual and collective human rights of religious minorities and particularly Christians in the OSCE region needs to be strengthened nowadays as well. Christians represent a great majority among victims of hate crimes all over the world. The situation is worrisome in some parts of the OSCE neighborhood where various Christian minorities are targeted. This have certain impact on the participating states. For instance Armenia has been receiving thousands of Christian refugees from Syria.

The OSCE region itself is by far not immune from violence targeting Christians. Christian places of worship and cultural heritage are often desecrated, attacked and in certain cases simply destroyed and razed. Violent mob, extremist political parties and even official law enforcement agencies are among perpetrators of those crimes. Denying access of the fact-finding missions into areas affected by large-scale destructions of Christian heritage aggravates already committed hate crimes and emphasis the role and responsibility of certain political leadership who explicitly or implicitly authorized these deplorable actions.

In order to prevent and respond to the hate crimes against Christians we need to reinforce our commitments in protecting religious minorities particularly their rights to freedom of religion and believe, right to property and cultural rights. In this vein we have certain recommendations.

It is often the case that religious minorities exposed to hate crimes have had a long record of being marginalized and victimized in their respective societies. Their right to the truth

entails recognition, reparation and recovery. Any initiative to provide compensation or reparation can be effective if there is firm recognition of the past grievances and desire to build common future. Thus Christian communities should be empowered to exercise their right to the truth with regard to massive and grave violations occurred in the past. In this regard, we welcome the readiness of certain Christian denominations and their leadership to resolve long-standing property issues with the relevant participating states. We would recommend relevant Governments to engage themselves in frank and open dialogue with the representatives of the Christian Churches.

Attacks against places of worships and intentional destructions of Christian cultural heritage should be recognized as a grave violation of human rights and one of the worst forms of hate crimes. An unimpeded access to the victims, places of worship and religious sites affected as a result of attacks should be provided without any delay to the OSCE participating states and relevant international organizations.

Thank you.