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## "Challenges to Freedom of Expression for Christians West of Vienna"

### Final Reinforced Plenary Session of the OSCE Review Conference, Astana Kazakhstan 28. November 2010

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I represent the Austrian Round Table for Reconciliation and the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe, an organization that monitors and documents such cases.

Our sphere of our observation includes various social and political areas in the Human Dimension, particularly west of Vienna, where there is currently a growing marginalization and discrimination against Christians. Because particular threats are occurring at present in the area of freedom of expression, I will focus on this area, especially in view of the fact that the OSCE has strongly and repeatedly expressed affirmation of existing OSCE commitments to freedom of expression as essential for a free and democratic society, including free access to information, emphasizing the chilling effect of that censorship has.

To be consistent with the commitment to freedom of expression, it must include that Christians are able to speak freely and teach on the Christian understanding of the dignity and nature of man, as well as matters of faith, ethics and morals. I will give a few concrete examples where discrimination has been occurring:

**Public Freedom of Expression of Christians is being obstructed by harassment and violence and other disturbances, making it impossible to speak.** We have recorded several incidents of peaceful assemblies of Christians, which were protested against in a way that conveying a message was made impossible by shouting, blocking of doors, etc. To pick out three examples among many:

- In the Netherlands, homosexual activists disrupted Catholic religious services in February 2010.
- In October 2009 in Berlin, a peaceful pro-life-assembly was disrupted by about 400 activists, violently destroying the crosses that were being carried, partly by throwing them into Berlin's Spree River.
- During the Christian youth Conference "Christival", in Bremen in 2008 young

Christians were violently attacked because they declared their desire to live out their sexuality in accordance with the Word of God. Persons with unwanted same-sex attractions are being harassed and denied freedom of expression and freedom of choice to live out their sexuality in line with their convictions.

**Whereas debate and expressing disagreement *belongs to free speech, impairing the free speech of others and resorting to violence does not. Debate of diverging viewpoints, whether on the personal level, the scientific or on the public and political level belongs to everything we have been insisting upon here at the OSCE regarding freedom of expression.***

**Repression of freedom of expression also occurs on a political level by so-called hate speech legislation.** The right to express diverging viewpoints has been strongly emphasized by the OSCE. It seems, however, that so-called hate speech legislation at times causes repression of freedom of expression, especially when it criminalizes expression of Christian principles with regard to morals.

Examples of criminalizing expression of Christian principles have been occurring in the UK where there have been numerous recent cases of persons being arrested for defending the traditional Christian understanding of marriage, family and sexuality. Open and free public debate must be allowed in these areas. As Dunja Mijatovic, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media emphasized more than once in this session:

***"People should not be put in prison for expressing their views. Our goal is MORE freedom, not LESS freedom of expression and media."***

For more information on current cases of discrimination in this area you can search the OSCE website for our document "Key Recommendations for OSCE Summit in Astana 2010". The "Five Year Report of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians" will be available at this location as of Tuesday. Electronic copies may be requested.

**Conclusion:**

**We fully agree with the strong reaffirmation made at this Review Conference regarding the OSCE's commitment to freedom of expression, *without state repression or censorship.***

Thank you for your attention.