

STATEMENT FROM BARNABAS FUND

TREATMENT OF SYRIAN CHRISTIANS AND OTHER MINORITIES

In Vienna in July 2016 the Permanent Council discussed possible roles for the OSCE in the context of migration and refugee flows across OSCE territories.

However we are concerned about the lack of focus on background context, especially the genocide being perpetrated on 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.

That genocide is intended is clear from the public statements of these groups. That genocide is happening is clear from the actions on the ground; killings including of religious or cultural leaders, enslavement, sexual abuse of women and girls from minority religions, targeting of religious buildings, theft and extortion, kidnapping and ransom, driving non-Muslim populations out of controlled areas, limitation of rights for minorities who are allowed to remain.

All the above constitutes evidence of genocide under articles 2a (killing members of the group) 2b (Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group) and 2c (Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part) of the *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*.

Sadly for Christians in the Middle East this is merely one more episode of persecution - the Armenian genocides, the Assyrian genocide and the steady decline of Christianity in the region. Christians in Iraq have been decimated in the last two decades, and Christianity in Syria faces potential extinction.

What is of particular concern states is the lack of focus from OSCE countries on minorities in the areas of conflict, for aid and asylum. The extremely low numbers of religious minorities given asylum in some countries raises great concern. U.S. official figures show that Christians make up less than 1% of Syrians given asylum in the past couple of years, even though they represent about 10% of the Syrian population. While the U.K. government refuses to release figures, we understand that Syrian Christians make up only 1.9% of those given asylum in the UK.

Likewise governments appear reluctant to ensure that aid really reaches minorities, preferring a broad brush approach, despite the obvious marginalisation of minorities in Syria and Iraq.

I should mention the honourable exceptions of Poland, the Czech Republic and Australia which have been very welcoming to the hundreds of Christian asylum seekers in the Barnabas *Operation Safe Havens* programme. I also commend Hungary for setting up a department to specifically assist persecuted Christians, globally the largest persecuted religious group.