



Address by Ambassador Janez Lenarčič,
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and
Human Rights (ODIHR)

at the

OSCE High-level Meeting

“Preventing and Responding to Hate Incidents and
Crimes against Christians”

Rome, 12 September 2011

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Your Eminences,

Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to welcome you to Rome on behalf of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

The topic of our High-Level Meeting today is *'Hate Incidents and Hate Crimes against Christians'*. We will hear about these incidents and crimes; we will discuss ways to respond to them where they occur; and we will try to find ways of preventing them from occurring.

Let me start by explaining what ODIHR understands to be a hate crime, and why hate crimes are an important issue to deal with for a security organization like the OSCE. ODIHR's working definition - though by no means the only imaginable definition of the term - consists essentially of **two components**.

First, there must be a criminal act targeting individuals or property.

Second, the target of the offence, whether victim or property, is selected by the perpetrator who is guided by a bias motive -

and because of a real or perceived connection to a group - in this case, a religious group.

That hate crimes against individuals based on their real or perceived adherence to Christianity occur in the OSCE region is indisputable. In particular, ODIHR has reported in our annual Hate Crime Report on cases of:

- desecration of places of worship and cemeteries;
- arson and other property damage,
- attacks on worshippers, and
- attacks on religious leaders.

Such attacks instil fear, not just in the individuals they target directly, but also in the wider community, particularly where the Christian community in question belongs to a minority in its region or country.

The climate of fear and suspicion caused by hate crimes has the potential to create **insecurity within and between communities**, and **instability** both within and between OSCE States. This is the point of connection between the issue of hate crimes and the work of the OSCE: hate crimes are a security issue, and may contribute to de-stabilising regional or even inter-state relations.

This has been recognized clearly in OSCE commitments. In order to combat prejudice and promote tolerance, OSCE States have committed to action in such fields as

- legislation,
- law enforcement,
- education,
- data collection on and monitoring of hate crimes,
- media, and
- constructive public discourse.

ODIHR stands ready to assist States in this important endeavor, including in the area of hate crimes against Christians.

This conference can be seen as the continuation of the Conference on Intolerance and Discrimination of Christians organized by ODIHR in **March 2009**. At that conference – the first one of its kind in OSCE -, a wide variety of concerns about the situation of Christians in the OSCE region were raised, from impediments in providing and receiving religious education, difficulties in obtaining burial grounds for Christians, various forms of intolerance and discrimination to excessive constraints on the right to establish places of worship.

Our objective in organizing the Meeting for which we are gathered here today is to deal with another, more specific issue that was also raised at the 2009 conference: to **raise awareness of hate-motivated crimes** and incidents targeting Christians, in particular attacks on places of worship,

and to discuss ways of addressing and preventing such incidents.

The Meeting will be divided into **three working sessions**.

- The first session will explore the extent and nature of hate or bias-motivated violence against Christians.
- The second session will focus on prevention and response at the local, national and international level.
- The third session will examine the specific challenges associated with attacks on places of worship and how these can be addressed by governments and by religious communities themselves.

We are aiming for an interactive, open debate between panellists and participants, and I particularly encourage everyone to make recommendations to address the scourge of hate crimes against Christians. We would like to have your views on what can be done to prevent these crimes and to respond to them.

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Hate crimes against Christians, as well as intolerance and discrimination against Christians more broadly, will continue to be a topic of concern and a topic of action for our Office, the

OSCE/ODIHR. We look forward to hearing your views and to have a vibrant debate.

I would like to thank the OSCE Chairmanship for our excellent cooperation in the organization of this event and both the Italian government, our gracious hosts, and the Holy See for their generous contributions to the funding of this conference.

Thank you for your attention.