

OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

Session I: Freedom of religion or belief, non-discrimination & other human rights and fundamental freedoms as the essential normative basis for peaceful coexistence and security in the OSCE region

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Over the last nine years, the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians has documented over 2,000 incidents of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in the region west of Vienna.

We are very grateful to OSCE and the Chairmanship-in-Office for the seriousness with which the problem of intolerance and discrimination against Christians is being addressed. We applaud OSCE for seeking answers in numerous meetings and documents in which intolerance against Christians was specifically targeted.

According to experts, 2016 was the worst year in modern history for the persecution of Christians around the world. As you all know, the European Parliament, the United States Department of State, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and many political and faith leaders have all labeled the systematic targeting and killing of Christians and other religious minorities in Iraq and Syria as genocide.

With this, a continuing challenge for participating states remains: the protection of the most vulnerable asylum seekers – Christians and other religious minorities fleeing persecution and genocide. After they have risked their lives to reach safety, they have been met with violence, threats, and discrimination on the basis of their Christian faith at the hands of fellow migrants and, in some cases, the guards in refugee camps.

Participating states will be familiar with the 2016 Open Doors report about the grave situation Christian refugees face in Germany. And just last week, Open Doors Sweden released its own report with similar findings.

We urge participating states to recognize and address the special problem of Christian refugees, with the understanding that all refugees deserve protection, but that religious and ethnic conflicts do not disappear as people cross borders.

Further, given that many Christians and other religious minorities do not begin their perilous journeys to Europe through UNHCR refugee camps because of harassment and bullying, we urge participating states to make special efforts to bring Christian refugees and internally displaced persons to safety through channels beyond the UNHCR camps.

Providing a safe, open, and inclusive space for all those fleeing war and persecution must be at the core of the OSCE's comprehensive concept of peace and security.

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