

# OBSERVATORY ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

## **Intervention on behalf of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians by Barbara Vittucci**

**HDIM 2013, September 24, 10am**

### **Working Session 2: Tolerance and non-discrimination II**

This year, we celebrate 1700 years of the Edict of Milan, granting Freedom of Religion to a then rather surprised Roman Empire. 2010's special representative of the chair in office working on Christianity, Massimo Introvigne, said that worldwide, every five minutes, a Christian dies for his or her faith.

Taking a specific look at the phenomenon of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in the OSCE area, let me point out that the OSCE has held many meetings in this regard:

#### **OSCE had hosted numerous meetings on this topic. To name a few:**

- „The Role of Civil Society in Combating Hate Crimes against Christians“ in Rome in June 2012.
- OSCE High-Level Meeting on Preventing and Responding to Hate Incidents and Crimes against Christians, in September 2011
- OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Resolution on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in the OSCE area, adopted in Belgrade in July 2011
- Expert Round Table on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Vienna in 2009.
- ODIHR's annual hate crime report

But the OSCE is not alone in drawing attention to the issue: **In the European Parliament**, events took place on this issue in 2011 and 2012. Also **the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe** deplores psychological violence and negative stereotyping of people of faith in its recent resolution.

The **Astana Commemorative Declaration** says: „Greater efforts must be made to promote freedom of religion or belief and to combat intolerance and discrimination.”

West of Vienna, my organisation researched and documented over 1000 cases of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in the past six years. You can view them on our website [IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu](http://IntoleranceAgainstChristians.eu). We documented the spectrum ranging from hate crimes and hate incidents to negative stereotyping and exclusion. Also, this year for the first time, we published an analysis of Legal Restrictions Affecting Christians in Europe, which is also available on our website for download or hard copies.

West of Vienna we see a rising amount of Vandalism: For example, 84% of vandalism in France in 2010 was directed against Christian sites, said the then French Minister of the Interior in a letter to the Council of Europe.

UK based intellectual Ann Widdecomb spoke recently of a „small scale persecution“ and said, „If the small beginnings are not resisted then they grow into something bigger.“

### **Where do we go from here?**

#### **The Observatory on Intolerance against Christians recommends:**

- the targeted and purposeful implementation of the OSCE's own recommendations put forth by the Parliamentary Assembly's "Resolution on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in the OSCE Area", adopted in Belgrade in July 2011,

#### **particularly:**

- that a "**public debate** on intolerance and discrimination against Christians be initiated and that the right of Christians to participate fully in public life be ensured" (12);
- that „**legislation** in the participating States, including
  - **labour law,**
  - **equality law,**
  - **laws on freedom of expression and assembly,**
  - **and laws related to religious communities and rights of conscientious objection****be assessed** in view of discrimination and intolerance against Christians," (13);
- The Resolution also "encourages the media not to spread prejudices against Christians and to combat negative stereotyping" (15).

#### **Additionally we recommend:**

- **To Participating States:** to combat underreporting by collecting disaggregated data on hate crimes against Christians. In some countries, vandalism against a Christian site is only listed as vandalism against a public building.

- **To the OSCE/ODIHR:** to develop materials on how to combat intolerance against Christians and to disseminate this through the OSCE region.

- Combating persecution of Christians outside the OSCE area must become a priority of the **foreign secretaries of participating states** in their foreign policy.

I thank the OSCE for taking up this issue – which is key: to raise awareness and find solutions together. The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians offers our research and cooperation to you.

This intervention is available on the OSCE website.

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