

OBSERVATORY ON
INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION
AGAINST CHRISTIANS IN EUROPE

ENGLISH only

OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
22-23 June 2017
Session II
Statement by Ellen Fantini, Executive Director

We are very grateful to OSCE/ODIHR and the Austrian Chairmanship-in-Office for taking the issue of religious freedom so seriously. But there have been challenges in implementing OSCE commitments.

In regions both East and West of Vienna there are recurring hate-motivated incidents and hate crimes against Christians, including murder, destruction of Christian cemeteries and churches occurs daily in some places.

The Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe recently submitted data about **191 hate crimes against Christians in 16 European countries, West of Vienna**, for the OSCE 2016 hate crime report. That could be imagined as 4 hate crimes per week; or more than every other day.

Of the hate incidents reported by the Observatory, the majority were acts of vandalism or destruction at places of worship. As in 2015, there continued to be abuse and harassment of Christians in some refugee accommodations. Christmas displays, Christian schools and cemeteries were also frequent targets of hate incidents.

Data-collection is an essential tool to understand and address hate crimes. Under-reporting and under-recording remain a serious problem. Therefore, we encourage participating States to improve their efforts on data collection through measures such as increased involvement of civil society, disaggregated data and development of national action plans. To this end, the National Points of Contact are called upon to collect, maintain and make public disaggregated data on hate crimes perpetrated against members of different religions, in accordance with Ministerial Decision No. 9/09.

However, this hate crime data does not always provide a complete picture of the situation for Christians in Europe. While we commend the OSCE for gathering data from civil society organizations such as the Observatory, we note that incidents that qualify for inclusion in the hate crime report constitute a **small fraction** of the intolerance, discrimination, and legal restrictions Christians face in some countries. We reported over 300 incidents of intolerance and discrimination (including the hate crimes I mentioned earlier) against Christians in Europe in 2016, and these are just the incidents we know about.

Across Europe Christians have been fired, sued, and even arrested for exercising their freedom of expression or conscience. Christian-run businesses have been

ruined financially, Christian student groups have been silenced, and Christians symbols and celebrations have been removed from the public square. Christians and non-Christians should be equally concerned with the continuing infringement on their fellow citizens' rights.

The following are three concrete recommendations:

First, we respectfully remind participating states to combat underreporting by collecting disaggregated data on hate crimes against Christians. For example, in some countries, vandalism against a Christian church is merely reported as vandalism against a public building.

Secondly, we urge participating states to guarantee freedom of conscience and the right to exercise this freedom through conscientious objection, not only in relation to compulsory military service, but also in relation to the provision of services and performance of morally sensitive activities.

Thirdly, we reiterate our previous recommendations to OSCE to develop materials on how to combat intolerance against Christians and to disseminate them through the OSCE region. Manuals on how to combat anti-Semitism and discrimination against Muslims have previously been developed.