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## **Security needs, effective responses to intolerance and hate crimes against Christians discussed at OSCE/ODIHR event in Vienna**



***Ambassador Eberhard Pohl, Permanent Representative of Germany to the OSCE and Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council, and Cristina Finch, head of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-discrimination Department, at the OSCE/ODIHR Conference on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, Vienna, 14 December 2016. (OSCE/Micky Kroell)***

OSCE (14.12.2016) - Representatives of civil society, governments and international organizations explored ways to improve security for Christian communities in the OSCE region and to address intolerance against Christians at a conference held in Vienna on 14 December 2016.

The Conference on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians was organized by the 2016 German OSCE Chairmanship and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

"Numerous tragic events this year are sad evidence to the fact that no OSCE participating State is immune to hate-motivated crimes and incidents. Bias and prejudice exist in one

form or another everywhere. It is our responsibility to prevent and respond to all manifestations of intolerance, including against Christians," said Ambassador Eberhard Pohl, Permanent Representative of Germany to the OSCE and Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council. "I hope that this conference will add to our common efforts of developing sustainable strategies for eradicating the root causes of intolerance and discrimination not only against Christians, but in whatever manifestation and based on whatever motive they occur."

Cristina Finch, Head of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-discrimination Department, added: "Identifying specific security needs through dialogue with Christian communities is a necessary first step in effectively addressing intolerance. With the recommendations that this conference will produce, we will be able to work with civil society groups and participating States to develop the appropriate policies and initiatives."

ODIHR collects data on hate crimes and incidents, including those against Christians, which highlights gaps and under-reporting in the information provided on such hate crimes. This conference builds on the results of similar events held in 2011 and 2015 and on the 2005 [Cordoba Declaration](#) on combating various forms of intolerance.

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## ***Civil Society Pre-Meeting for Conference on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians Vienna, 13 December 2016: Recommendations***

### **To the Participating States:**

Participating States are called upon to:

- acknowledge the problems Christian refugees and asylum seekers in Europe, particularly Christian converts, face due to a lack of awareness within governments and media regarding the discriminations and persecution they encounter in Europe;
- develop a program specifically designed to protect the small minority of Christians present among the majority Sunni Muslim refugees and asylum seekers in refugee camps and in other accommodation, and specifically to:
  - a. protect Christian refugees and asylum seekers and guarantee their freedom of religion or belief, especially when hosted in camps, whether run by public agencies or private companies;
  - b. provide appropriate periodical training for translators and security personnel as they often turn out to be biased;
  - c. provide neutral and professional security personnel and translators, increasing the non-Muslim percentage among them;
  - d. improve the balance in ethnic/religious composition of refugees and, where this is impossible, cluster the Christian refugees together so that individual Christians are not isolated in accommodations;
  - e. as a matter of last resort, provide separate accommodation for Christian refugees and asylum seekers who have already been victims of persecution and discrimination and have been traumatized by it;
  - f. provide educational training for refugees, mainstreaming the promotion of tolerance and non discrimination and the respect for freedom of religion or belief.
- provide disaggregated data on hate crimes, paying due attention to hate crimes against Christians – including where they are a majority – in the questionnaire collecting data from national data collection points;

- fulfill their obligations to provide security to Christian churches and communities and invest the necessary resources to protect them. mandate the ODIHR to specifically develop and strengthen capacity-building activities pertaining to the protection of Christian churches, cemeteries, and community buildings;
- encourage better implementation and distribution of already existing quality educational material. implement necessary extensive practical training (exchange programs for example) on education;
- encourage civil society and representatives of different faith-based groups to provide materials as well as participate in the discussion about education.
- provide training for authorities, government officials, translators, religious figures, community leaders and the whole society on education, without forgetting the education of the adult population in the discussion. All religious communities should interact with each other on all levels, not just on the ground and the highest levels. Families also have to recognize their responsibility in educating the next generation with the least amount of prejudices possible;
- encourage and facilitate the religious dialogue, especially where the religious communities do not do it themselves. These dialogues should include all the religions and denominations present in the country, as well as non-religious communities. Furthermore we encourage the participating States to interact with these groups both in a local and national level.

We recall that the participating States, in the 1989 Vienna Concluding Document, committed themselves to “foster a climate of mutual tolerance and respect between believers of different communities as well as between believers and non-believers” (16.2) and to “favourably consider the interest of religious communities to participate in public dialogue, including through the mass media” (16.11)

**To the ODIHR:**

The ODIHR is called upon to:

- train law enforcement agencies, judiciary, and civil society to identify and properly respond to hate crimes against Christians – including where they are a majority – with the same determination as they would combat hatred against members of other religious communities.
- develop and strengthen capacity-building activities pertaining to the protection of Christian churches, cemeteries, and community buildings;
- develop guidelines for educators on countering intolerance and discrimination against Christians;
- initiate training programs for media professionals focusing on the media’s role in promoting tolerance and respect towards Christians, through fair, accurate, and impartial reporting;
- collect practices and develop resources on interfaith and interreligious dialogue and experiences.

**To the Representative on the Freedom of the Media:**

The Representative on the Freedom of the Media is called upon to provide guidelines for voluntary professional and ethical standards aimed to:

- a. promote knowledge and understanding of religions, including various Christian denominations;
  - b. give a fair, accurate, and impartial portrayal of religious beliefs;
  - c. ensure that Christian churches and communities are given the opportunity to freely express their own views in the media.
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## Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians (OSCE/ ODIHR Conference in Vienna)

By Dominic Zoehrer, HRWF expert on FoRB in Vienna



**Vienna, 14.12.2016 (HRWF) - The conference on “Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians” held under the German OSCE chairmanship on 14 December, 2016, in Vienna was a follow up to last year’s meeting on enhancing efforts to prevent discrimination against Christians.<sup>1</sup> The security of Christian communities in the OSCE region and beyond is increasingly becoming a matter of great concern. The objectives of the three sessions of this conference were (1) to identify current patterns of intolerance and to discuss measures for ensuring the security of Christians and the protection of their places of worship, (2) to explore educational approaches aimed at promoting freedom of religion and belief (FoRB), and (3) to discuss governmental and legislative actions in line with principles of equality and non-discrimination in order to ensure that Christian communities can practice their belief without restriction or fear of violence.**

**Ambassador Eberhard Pohl**, Permanent Representative of Germany to the OSCE and Chairperson of the OSCE Permanent Council, underlined in his opening remarks that the recent attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt remind us that it is our collective responsibility to combat religious intolerance. Having a longstanding tradition of assisting civil society, ODIHR is offering a platform to discuss the concerns of Christians in the OSCE region, the Middle East and North Africa. Under the German chairmanship, the OSCE will continue to encourage participating states to effectively counter hate crimes and develop sustainable strategies against discrimination.

Introducing the program of the conference, **Ms. Cristina Finch**, Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department of the OSCE/ODIHR, recalled that FoRB is a long-

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. <http://www.osce.org/cio/155481?download=true> [accessed 2016.12.16]

standing OSCE commitment dating back to the 1975 Helsinki Act. However, as the ODIHR's annual hate crime report of 2015 has shown, arson attacks against places of worship or assaults on religious leaders increasingly cause concern. Twenty-two participating states have reported 120 violent attacks and 480 cases of hate crimes against Christians last year.

The keynote speech was delivered by **Rev. Msgr. Dr. Antoine Camilleri**, Under-Secretary for the Holy See's Relations with States. He stressed the Holy See's engagement for FoRB as its key priority to save the holy dignity of every man and every woman and referred to the guarantee of FoRB rights as "the litmus test for all other fundamental freedoms." Apart from the barbarian and violent persecution of Christians in regions outside the OSCE participating states, new forms of discrimination have appeared in recent years that restrict the freedom of speech of religious people in the public sphere of Western nations. "Well intended anti-discrimination legislations that limit FoRB rights thus happen to be in stark contrast to OSCE commitments", Rev. Camilleri said. By developing dialogue and partnership among and with religious communities, state actors can sustainably promote tolerance, respect and mutual understanding.

### **Session 1: Security of Christian communities across the OSCE region**

Introducing the first session, **Dr. Mattia Ferrero**, Co-ordinator of the Giuseppe Dossetti Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom, emphasized the structural link between human rights and FoRB on the one hand and security on the other hand. "Security and the protection of human rights are characteristic of the concerns of the OSCE," Dr. Ferrero said. Being able to go to church or to synagogue cannot be considered an act of luxury since the freedom of worship is a basic right. And yet, some cathedrals in Italy or in France are being guarded 24 hours per day by the military. Dr. Ferrero underlined the role of data collection and warned that under-reporting undermines the effectiveness of combating hate crimes.

The second introducer to the first session, **Ambassador Tetiana Izhevskaya**, the Ambassador of Ukraine to the Holy See and former Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, reported some specific instances of recent hate crimes against Christians in the Mediterranean region: In Bologna, religious statues were besmeared with the words "Allahu Akbar". In the Provence, statues of Virgin Mary were beheaded. In Cairo, 35 people were killed in the bombing of a Coptic cathedral. Among the victims were many women and children. Ms. Izhevskaya pointed out FoRB ongoing violence in the Donbas region in Ukraine where religion has become a pretext for the justification of attacks against churches that are not affiliated with the Russian-Orthodox Church under the patriarch of Moscow. Beside the role of state actors, she also highlighted the responsibility of religious leaders to oppose intolerance and discrimination. When she led a seminar on non-discrimination and tolerance within an OSCE program for students, one student asked her: "What should I do if the mufti calls to intolerance in his sermon?" Ms. Izhevskaya concluded that FoRB should be promoted especially among the youth.

An earnest appeal was made by **Ms. Mona Walter**, a Christian by choice and representative of the human rights organization Set My People Free (SMPF). She described the difficult situation of Christian converts of Somali background who suffer persecution by the Muslim Somali communities in UK, Sweden and other countries. Ms. Walter pointed out the lack of reporting of cases of violence against Christians in the media for fears of appearing as "Islamophobic". She mentioned a case where a Somali ex-Muslim was threatened at gun point, forced to hold a Qur'an and renounce her Christian faith. Although this was filmed and the video posted on Youtube, the crime was not reported and went unpunished. As recent as 2014, Ms. Walter herself was forced to

watch the beheading of a Somali Christian and threatened into renouncing her faith. Her offer to speak about religious freedom in Swedish was refused by the authorities who consider her an "Islamophobe".

**Dr. Daniel Ottenberg**, persecution analyst of Open Doors, presented a survey on the lack of protection for Christians in German refugee shelters. In 2016, there have been 743 documented cases of religiously motivated attacks against Christian refugees of whom more than half stated that they are converts. Due to fears of reprisals only 20% of these attacks were reported to the German police.<sup>2</sup>

The Chief Rabbi of Vienna, **Arie Folger**, expressed his sympathy for persecuted Christians on behalf of the Conference of European Rabbis. He underlined the necessity to increase public awareness about the discrimination of Christians in the Middle East and at the doorsteps to Europe.

## **Session II: Sharing best practices: Educational approaches and awareness-raising measures**

The second session was introduced by **Ms. Elena Agapova**, Deputy Chairwoman of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society and the Head of IOPS Civic Center for the Protection of Christians of the Middle East and North Africa. Ms. Agapova stated that violent acts and hate crimes motivated by religious extremism at the borders of the OSCE increasingly pose a threat for FoRB within the region. In order to increase public awareness of this issue cases of hate crimes need to be monitored and reported. Furthermore, the international community is responsible to develop prevention strategies to stop the expansion of terrorist aggression. Ms. Agapova suggested three recommendations to the OSCE participating states in order to promote the social integration of religious minorities and the values shared by all faiths: (1) promote interstate measures aimed at interfaith harmony; (2) apply educational approaches that endow young people with critical thinking and intercultural knowledge, and improve teaching resources and school frameworks for this purpose; (3) integrate the experience and contributions of civil society representatives.

The second introduction was given by **Ambassador Dimitris Moschopoulos**, former EU Facilitator for the Protection of Religious and Cultural Heritage Sites of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Kosovo. Mr. Moschopoulos questioned the premise that the attacks against places of worship of the Serbian-Orthodox Church in Kosovo were religious in nature and pointed out that the conflict in Kosovo is essentially motivated by ethnic resentments. Although religion did play a role to aggravate the conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (i. e. between Serbian nationalists and the Ottoman Empire), religious sites are often regarded as national symbols instead of places of worship. A crucial challenge in today's Kosovo is indeed the reconciliation of interreligious relations, specifically between the Serbian-Orthodox and Muslim authorities. However, the fundamental root of the ethnic conflicts is nationalism and to effectively face this challenge, Mr. Moschopoulos recommended to keep religion out of the conflict and to encourage the government of Kosovo to protect FoRB rights and church properties.

**Alexander Verkhovskiy**, director of the SOVA Center for Information and Analysis in Russia, stated that Russia's new law banning proselytism was intended to ban Jehovah Witnesses, but actually affects all Protestant Christians throughout Russia. However, it cannot be the state's task to decide which interpretation of the Bible is correct.

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<sup>2</sup> See full report here:

[https://www.opendoors.de/downloads/Berichte/Open\\_Doors\\_survey\\_Lack\\_of\\_protection\\_for\\_religious\\_minorities\\_in\\_Germany\\_2016\\_10.pdf](https://www.opendoors.de/downloads/Berichte/Open_Doors_survey_Lack_of_protection_for_religious_minorities_in_Germany_2016_10.pdf) [accessed 15.12.2016]

**Ms. Mona Walter** highlighted the importance of educating migrants with Muslim backgrounds in line with the Art. 1 and Art. 18 of the UDHR and reported about the difficulty of reporting hate crimes without being accused by local authorities of Islamophobia.

### **Session III: The way forward: Preventing and responding to intolerance and discrimination by building trust between communities**

The first introducer of the third session, **Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy**, President Emeritus and Senior Advisor of Interfaith Alliance Foundation, underlined the fact that more than 70% of religious believers worldwide face serious restrictions of their freedom to believe. In over 20 countries, Christians who practice their beliefs are threatened by violence and persecution. Rev. Gaddy referred to 7,000 Christians killed for their faith in 2015 alone as reported by Open Doors. "Although some Christians may view such persecution as a sign of religious devotion, but no Christian should tolerate the lack of respect for other religions," Rev. Gaddy said.

The second introducer was **Ms. Mag. Elizabeta Kitanovic**, the Executive Secretary for Human Rights of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) in Belgium. The CEC was founded in 2009, has offices in Strasbourg and Brussels, and comprises a following of over one hundred Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches. Ms. Kitanovic reported that the CEC developed educational materials for its members that serve as a tool to learn about the relationship between human rights, human dignity and Christian values. She told of an experience she had during a recent training seminar in Serbia where Muslim, Christian and Jewish representatives were invited and participants encouraged to learn to understand more about each other. At this occasion, one imam commented that if such trainings were offered 20 years ago, many atrocities could have been avoided.

### **Recommendations by Civil Society Representatives to the OSCE participating states**

- Develop guidelines for staff and translators of refugee camps (Open Doors).
- Ensure documenting and reporting of religiously motivated hate crimes in refugee camps (Open Doors).
- Sensitize police officers about the religious background of anti-Christian discrimination (Open Doors).
- Give special attention to FoRB education in refugee programs (Open Doors)
- Offer training for security personnel and translators (Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe, OIDACE)
- Improve the balance of religious composition of refugees (OIDACE)
- Provide separate accommodation for Christians who are often already traumatized by discrimination (OIDACE)
- Better implementation of quality education material (OIDACE)
- Facilitate religious dialogue that includes all denominations present in a country (OIDACE)
- Stop arbitrary imposing of hate speech laws that narrow the debate on controversial issues, i. e. the definition of marriage. The freedom of thought, conscience and belief and the freedom of expression should be ensured in liberal democracies. (ADF International)
- Highlight the importance of educating migrants with Muslim backgrounds in line with the Art. 1 and Art. 18 of the UDHR (SMPF)
- Recognize the right to conscientious objection which essentially characterizes liberal societies. (The intolerance against Christian voices on moral issues, i. e. questions on euthanasia or same-sex marriage, is on the rise, thus significantly curtails the right to conscientious objection.)

- Encourage the reporting of hate crimes (SMPF)
- Develop guidelines and offer training for media representatives to promote fair reporting (OIDACE)
- Promote knowledge of Christian denominations through the media, give them a chance to express their views (OIDACE)

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## **FOREF Europe promoting FoRB rights at the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting 2016**

HRWF (04.11.2016) - Since 2003, FOREF Europe, a secular non-confessional NGO based in Vienna, has regularly represented civil society at the OSCE/ODIHR Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) in Warsaw. In their report this year ([www.foref-europe.org](http://www.foref-europe.org)), they have published a summary of

- the statements made by the introductory speakers at the working session on freedom of religion and belief (FoRB)
- their intervention on Hungary's controversial church law
- the phenomenon of government-sponsored NGOs, such as FECRIS

and some other issues.

Here are some excerpts of FOREF report.

### ***About the OSCE/ ODIHR***

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is the world's largest regional security organization. With 57 participating states in North America, Europe and Asia some refer to the OSCE as "the little UN".

The beginning of the OSCE traces back to the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and the subsequent series of conferences known as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). The latter served as an important multilateral forum for dialogue between East and West during the Cold War and responded to new challenges arising in the post-Cold War period with the break-up of former Yugoslavia and the subsequent conflicts. Evolving beyond its original role the CSCE was renamed as the OSCE in 1994.

The OSCE serves as a forum for political dialogue that addresses security issues through (i) the politico-military, (ii) the economic and environmental, and (iii) the human dimensions, on the basis of political commitments among the participating States. The "human dimension" encompasses the advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, support for holding transparent and democratic elections, ensuring the rule of law and the protection of national minorities and the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

The central OSCE institution committed to the human dimension is the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The largest annual human rights conference in the OSCE region is the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM) hosted by the ODIHR. This conference provides a forum for dialogue between delegations of the 57 member states and representatives of civil society.

The total financial contributions by participating states to the OSCE amounts to 141,107,600 EUR according to the [Annual Report 2015](#). The biggest contributors are the USA (13,0%), Germany (11,0%), France, the United Kingdom and Italy (10,4% each). (The share given by the Russian Federation of 3,9% or 5,8 million EUR is comparably low.)

### ***Exposing GONGOs at the OSCE: the case of FECRIS***

At the HDIM civil society representatives receive an important chance to present their critique of bad government practices in front of 57 state delegations of the OSCE region. However, an interesting phenomenon is the presence of so-called GONGOs (government-organized non-governmental organizations) – NGOs that are fully financed by respective governments – shamelessly taking their seats in the civil society section. Such GONGOs are often being deployed by states characterized by legal frameworks that are institutionally restrictive against FoRB rights, i.e. Russia or France.

One such GONGO is FECRIS (European Federation of Research and Information Centers on Sectarianism), a European umbrella organization that is completely financed by the French government and closely cooperates with representatives of the Russian-Orthodox church (cf. [the recent HDIM statement by Coordination des Associations et des Particuliers pour la Liberté de Conscience](#)). Already in October 2013 FOREF Europe openly remarked on the state affiliation of FECRIS in a brief intervention at the HDIM setting and criticized its objective of exporting France's highly controversial and discriminatory anti-cult legislation to other countries in the OSCE region (see [Reply to the FECRIS Statement](#)). A highly acclaimed scientific study regarding the ideology, structure, activities and financing of FECRIS has been published by Gerhard Besier and Hubert Seiwert in 2012 (see [Freedom of Religion or Belief – Anti-Sect Movements and State Neutrality. A Case Study: FECRIS](#)).

FECRIS representatives used to regularly read their statements in HDIM sessions on FoRB issues. However, in recent years FECRIS only submits their document to the OSCE online platform without presenting it during the civil society's speakers time. This year their statement was again crafted with highly abstract and pseudo-scientific terms such as "mind control process", but failed to articulate clear and operational recommendations based on OSCE commitments. Instead, Luigi Corvaglia, the president of the FECRIS subgroup CESAP, claims in his statement that FoRB rights are "used as a Trojan horse" to infiltrate democratic institutions. (See the FECRIS statement for the HDIM 2016 [here](#).)

Recently a [new documentary](#) has revealed the perfidious methods applied by FECRIS and how the anti-cult formation financially exploits naïve parents by promising them to "rescue" their child from the hands of a "cult". Alexander Dvorkin, FECRIS vice-president, and Alexander Neveev, a psychologist, masterminded an operation against 19-year old girl in Odessa/Ukraine. Yulia Yalovaya's mother paid 12,000 dollars to FECRIS in order to "liberate" her daughter from a job at an alternative newspaper. NGOs authentically representing civil society will not cease to expose the anti-cult narrative of FECRIS and how it abuses public funding for violating the fundamental freedoms of individuals and religious minority groups.

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