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# **WORLD: Intolerance and discrimination against Christians, a new report**

## **Intolerance and discrimination against Christians, a new report**

*Observatory Intolerance Against Christians – (10.06.2022) – New report finds evidence of self-censorship among Christians in Europe. Case studies of France and Germany show an advanced degree of social pressure driven by secular intolerance. In Mexico and Colombia practicing Christians face similar challenges as in the European countries.*

A new study, of two European (France and Germany) and two Latin American countries (Colombia and Mexico), finds that the growing secular intolerance increasingly threatens Christian's freedom of expression. It suggests that the chilling effect and its corollary, self-censorship, among Christians are real. Based on an exploratory and inductive methodology, this research sheds light on the negative effects secular intolerance has on the freedom of expression of actively practicing Christians.

**OIDAC Europe**, its Latina American partner **OLIRE** and **IIRF** (International Institute for Religious Freedom) have presented today in Vienna a joint report called **Perceptions on Self-Censorship: Confirming and Understanding the "Chilling Effect"**. It summarizes the results of four case studies, each in a different country, conducted through personal interviews with practicing Christians from different sectors of society. The results reveal perceptions of the phenomenon of self-censorship and provide understanding of different contextual nuances.

**Madeleine Enzlberger**, Executive Director of **OIDAC Europe**, moderated the presentation: *"One of the most worrying and tragic findings of this report is that if the social costs to follow your belief and to express it become too high, people will ultimately abandon their belief. And it is especially younger and uneducated people whose faith is at risk here."*

**Friederike Boellmann**, one of the three authors, underlined: *"It's not about strict legal cases or persecution even, but every person that I interviewed noticed a change in the climate or a narrowing of the opinion corridor. It was also surprising to find that the German case reveals Universities as the most hostile environment. And the largest extent of self-censorship I found in my research in the academic realm."*

The report is the result of extensive qualitative research, conducted in 4 countries, and builds upon a decade of research about secular intolerance. **France and Germany were picked as examples for European countries with an advanced degree of secularization. Mexico and Colombia face very similar challenges as the European countries.** In the case of France and Germany, authors noted that the “chilling effect” was mostly caused by the cultural mindset, rather than the current legal landscape.

The results were discussed by six experts: Dennis Petri, Editor of the report and International Director of IIRF; Friederike Boellmann, a sociologist and author of the German case study; Simon Calvert from *The Christian Institute*(UK); Teresa Flores, Director of OLIRE (*Observatorio de Libertad Religiosa en América Latina*); Paul Rowe, Professor for Political and International Studies at Trinity Western University, Canada; and Janet Epp-Buckingham, Executive Editor of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom*.

Summarizing the cases in Mexico and Colombia, **Teresa Flores** concluded that: “*We can say that the phenomenon of self-censorship is not only configured when a Christian does not openly manifest his faith and religious convictions but also refers to situations in which Christians cannot express their faith-based points of view on controversial issues. The research reveals that social pressure is also a very influential factor of self-censorship.*”

**Dennis P. Petri**, editor of the report, commented: “*We know about the court cases, the threats, etc. We know where secular intolerance comes from, we know how it manifests itself, but we don’t know its intensity. We have a hard time engaging its scope and to try to determine how it affects the Church and Christian life. The problem with secular intolerance and with self-censorship is that it happens very often but on a small scale. But all those small incidents kind of add up. And that’s when we can use this analogy of “death by a thousand*

*cuts". One small cut doesn't kill you, but thousand cuts can. It can damage religious freedom."*

Talking about his experience, **Simon Calvert** narrated: *"One of the most common questions we get asked is along the lines of "Can I say X"; "Is it legal for me to express a Christian view about Abortion or Sexuality and Gender?". And informed Christians are asking this quite seriously: "Are there laws to prevent us from expressing a Christian view about Same-Sex Marriage, or about Gender?" That's the level of self-censorship that we've reached where people think that it must somehow be against the law to express these views and of course it is not."*

**Paul Rowe** gave an overview of similar dynamics happening in Canada and concluded: *"Freedom of religion and believe is not a political plot of some sort, associated with only one type of believe or religion, but it is in fact a value that should be held up by everyone no matter their religion or believe, or lack of it."*

Ms. Enzlberger added that *"These findings should not lead to fear, division, or resentment, but rather to a better understanding of how much we need a pluralistic society, where everyone can speak without fear of repercussion and live out their faith without being discriminated against."*

Closing the Panel, **Janet-Epp Buckingham** said: *"We often think of religious persecution as being – you know – people who are jailed or facing criminal charges, or even facing death for their faith. But in secular countries there is this "death by a thousand cuts" in the sense of being having numerous smaller matters adding up to the larger issue of feeling under pressure for your faith and thereby having this chilling effect that "I can't say anything about my faith". The case in Mexico shows that children in school are afraid that they will be bullied and people are afraid that in their job they won't get a promotion."*

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