

Catholic Groups Release Report on the State of Religious Freedom

On 18th December, MEPs Mario Mauro and Konrad Szymanski hosted in the European Parliament a presentation of a new report on the state of religious freedom in the world. The report was published by Aid to the Church in Need International (ACN), a Roman Catholic agency that works in support of Catholics that are considered to be persecuted for their faith.

The 2012 edition of *Religious Freedom in the World* examines the conditions of religious freedom in 197 countries and has been made available in six languages. The editor of the report, Peter Sefton-Williams, was at the meeting to present the principal findings of ACN's research. Although acknowledging signs of more openness and the easing of restrictions in some countries, Sefton-Williams pointed out that a number of other countries have experienced a tightening of religious liberties in 2012.

Curiously, Sefton-Williams also claimed that of the 131 countries studied with predominant Christian populations, not a single case of legislation restricting religious freedom was enacted in 2012; by contrast, he said, "Islamic countries stood out in first place" in respect to establishing far greater restrictions toward religious minorities, especially toward Christians.

It could have been difficult to assess the intention of Mr Sefton-Williams' remarks, had it not been for the anti-Muslim sentiment that infused those of other speakers at this event. Sadly absent from the debate was a deeper analysis of the statistics presented in the report. A more critical look at the historical, economic and political realities that have led to our current crisis, along with a good measure of self-reflection, would serve us all well.