



d



2.22.2011

GLOBAL CSW welcomes growing EU interest in religious freedom and calls for consistency and transparency

Christian Solidarity Worldwide (CSW) welcomes yesterday's decision by the Foreign Affairs Council of the European Union to adopt Council Conclusions on "intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief", which condemn "recent violence and acts of terrorism, in various countries, against Christians and their places of worship, Muslim pilgrims and other religious communities".

The Conclusions specify that while "no part of the world is exempt from the scourge of religious intolerance", freedom of religion or belief remains a universal human right which "needs to be protected everywhere and for everyone" with States having a legal obligation to protect their citizens, including representatives of religious minorities. CSW urges the EU to be consistent in raising concerns about religious freedom with third countries and make the EU Action Plan on religious freedom open to public scrutiny.

The increased interest of European policy institutions in freedom of religion or belief in general, and the volatile situation of religious minorities in particular, coincides with the recent wave of religiously-motivated violence and persecution in Nigeria, Egypt, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and other countries. It is the second time that the Council has adopted Conclusions pertaining to freedom of religion or belief, and follows the European Parliament's resolution on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion on January 20, and the Council of Europe's recommendation concerning violence against Christians in the Middle East on January 27.

CSW continues to maintain a dialogue with EU Ministries of Foreign Affairs and EU bodies such as the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the European Parliament, in order to advance EU's policy on freedom of religion or belief. On January 26, CSW drafted and signed a joint letter on behalf of the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID), co-signed by Norwegian Mission to the East, Swedish Mission Council and Religions for Peace-Europe, which listed a set of guiding principles and concrete recommendations to the EU.

CSW's National Director Stuart Windsor said, "CSW welcomes the EU's increasing interest in freedom of religion or belief and in the situation of vulnerable religious groups around the world, notably through its adoption of an EU Action Plan and of Council Conclusions on freedom of religion or belief. While these are positive moves, the Council Conclusions now need to be followed with concrete measures and benchmarks which will deliver clear results. CSW urges the EU to condemn religiously motivated violence and persecution, and to raise concerns about governmental and societal hostilities against religious groups in a systematic manner with third countries. We also encourage the EU to support interfaith initiatives and human rights defenders working for religious freedom, and to engage in a meaningful, transparent exchange of views with civil society. The time has come to establish a permanent capacity within the EEAS to analyze and understand the role of religion in today's globalised societies and to develop an EU strategy on religious freedom. Making the EU Action Plan on religious freedom public would be a first step in the right direction."

Notes to Editors:

1. The first time similar Council Conclusions were adopted was during the Swedish EU Presidency in November 2009.

2. A copy of the joint letter can be obtained from the CSW Press Office.
3. Council Conclusions on intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion or belief, Foreign Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, February 21, 2011:
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/EN/genaff/119404.pdf
4. Council Conclusions on freedom of religion or belief, General Affairs Council meeting, Brussels, November 16, 2009:
http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/en/gena/111231.pdf
5. Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, recommendation 1957 (2011) concerning violence against Christians in the Middle East, Strasbourg, January 27, 2011:
<http://assembly.coe.int/main.asp?Link=/documents/adoptedtext/ta11/erec1957.htm>
6. European Parliament resolution on the situation of Christians in the context of freedom of religion, Strasbourg, January 20, 2011: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2011-0021+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN&language=EN>