



Doc. 12724

28 September 2011

Violence against Christians in the Middle East

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1957 (2011)

Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has considered Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1957 \(2011\)](#) on “Violence against Christians in the Middle East”.
2. With regard to the tragic events and issues which the Assembly refers to, the Committee of Ministers points out that it strongly condemned these acts in the Declaration on religious freedom which it adopted in January 2011. At that time, it also reiterated that freedom of thought, conscience and religion is an inalienable fundamental right and stressed that “there can be no democratic society based on mutual understanding and tolerance without respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Its enjoyment is an essential precondition for living together”.
3. With more specific regard to the situation in the countries of the Middle East, the Committee of Ministers is working on a coherent policy towards neighbouring regions with a view to fostering dialogue and co-operation with the countries and regions close to Europe that seek the assistance of the Council of Europe on the basis of the shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Given the resources at the Organisation’s disposal, such a strategy will have to be properly targeted and conducted in co-operation with Europe’s neighbours and relevant international partners. The Council of Europe can offer its expertise in the field of the protection of the freedom of thought, conscience and religion and share its experience in fostering standards of protection of rights of persons belonging to religious minorities. The Committee of Ministers will bear the Assembly’s recommendations on the matter in mind.
4. The Committee of Ministers agrees with the Assembly about the need to combat all forms of religious fundamentalism and the manipulation of religious beliefs for political reasons. It believes that education, interreligious youth work and dialogue are important tools for helping to prevent and combat such developments. It also agrees about the need to address anti-Christian stereotypes and bias – an approach which should be extended to the treatment of all religions and beliefs. That is a precondition for application of the principle set out in paragraph 9 of the recommendation whereby the coexistence of religious groups is a sign of pluralism and of an environment favourable to the development of democracy and human rights.
5. The Committee of Ministers has issued a number of recommendations to member states in this connection, including Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)12 on the dimension of religions and non-religious convictions within intercultural education and, more generally, Recommendations CM/Rec(2010)7 on the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, CM/Rec(2011)4 on education for global interdependence and solidarity and CM/Rec(2011)6 on intercultural dialogue and the image of the other in history teaching. In its Resolution CM/Res(2008)23 on the youth policy of the Council of Europe, the Committee of Ministers committed itself to supporting initiatives of young people and their organisations with regard to conflict prevention and management, as well as post-conflict reconciliation by means of intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension. It urges member states to follow the principles set out in these instruments which will help to foster dialogue, mutual knowledge and understanding between the various cultures and religions and to support the efforts of religious institutions in the Middle East to promote dialogue.

1. adopted at the 1121st meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (21 September 2011)



6. The Committee of Ministers would also highlight the relevance of the annual Council of Europe Exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, the aim of which is to promote and strengthen the fundamental Council of Europe values in order to foster mutual respect and awareness and tolerance within society, and to associate – in the framework of an open, transparent dialogue – representatives of religions traditionally present in Europe and other players in civil society in the pursuit of this goal.

7. It also wishes to draw the Assembly's attention to the work done by the Steering Committee on Higher Education and Research (CDESR) under a project targeted towards promoting intercultural dialogue in higher education, recognising the primary role of universities as platforms for mobility of students, on the one hand, and underlining their responsibility for developing intercultural competences, including tolerance and respect for different cultures and religious beliefs, on the other.

8. In terms of the need to analyse the evolution of cultural and religious developments mentioned in paragraph 11 of the recommendation, the attention of the Assembly is also drawn to the report by the Group of Eminent Persons, "Living together – Combining diversity and freedom in 21st century Europe", which was presented at the 121st Session of the Committee of Ministers in Istanbul. The report suggests a number of areas of activity for the Council of Europe, the feasibility of which is being studied by the Committee of Ministers.

9. Nevertheless, with regard to the recommendation made by the Assembly in paragraph 11.1 that a "permanent capacity" be developed, the Committee of Ministers believes that the Council of Europe has the necessary bodies and legal framework for monitoring the issues raised by the Assembly in member states. It therefore does not intend setting up a specific new body. In particular, it would underline the work of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), which has responded systematically in its country reports to discrimination and intolerance suffered by religious communities of all kinds and issued detailed recommendations to the governments concerned.

10. The Committee of Ministers assures the Assembly that promoting the right to freedom of thought, conviction and religion will remain high on its agenda, as a founding principle of the Council of Europe on which lasting peace and stability in Europe and beyond depend. It therefore welcomes the Assembly's support in this connection.