

EN
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Answer given by Vice-President Mogherini
on behalf of the Commission
(11.4.2017)

The High Representative/Vice-President (HR/VP) is well aware of the findings of the 2016 report of Aid to the Church in Need (ACN). The HR/VP agrees that the situation of Christians, notably in the Middle-East, is deeply troubling, as is the situation of other religious minorities in the region.

With the adoption of guidelines on freedom of religion or belief (FoRB) in June 2013, the EU stepped up its dedication to promote and protect this challenged universal freedom. The guidelines notably provide EU officials with practical guidance on how to seek to prevent violations of FoRB, to analyse cases, and to react effectively to violations whenever they occur. A renewed commitment to FoRB has been affirmed in the new EU Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019.

Countering radicalisation and violent extremism is one of the areas identified by EU Ministers in their conclusions on Counter Terrorism (9 February 2015) as key for EU external CT efforts. This includes actions such as facilitating inter faith dialogue, people to people contact, academic and cultural exchanges and supporting civil society action. Moreover, the EU helps advance the Countering violent extremism agenda by outreaching to third countries and participating actively in the Global CT Forum and the UN, especially after the presentation early 2016 of the UN Secretary General Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism. The EU also finances capacity building projects on Countering violent extremism in third countries.

FoRB is part and parcel of the EU's human rights policy underpinning its foreign policy and its development cooperation. The European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) includes a specific commitment in this area and its global call for proposals in 2017 addresses FoRB promoting dialogue and mediation (indicative amount € 5 million).

The EU will carry on using the full range of its diplomatic tools, at bilateral and multilateral level, as well as project funding to defend the right for all persons belonging to religious or belief communities to practice freely, individually or in community.

As stated in the EU guidelines on freedom of religion or belief, "violations of FoRB will be taken into account by the EU when deciding on appropriate measures under human rights clauses in agreement with third countries, including the possible suspension of cooperation, notably as regards financial assistance".