

75% of Those Killed for Religious Hatred Are Christian

Vatican Urges UN to Protect the Right to Seek Truth

GENEVA, Switzerland, MARCH 7, 2011 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Citing a study that found 75 out of every 100 people killed for religious hatred are Christian, the Vatican's representative at the U.N. offices in Geneva is reiterating that freedom of religion is at the heart of fundamental human rights.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, permanent representative of the Holy See to the U.N. offices in Geneva, affirmed this last Wednesday when he addressed the 16th ordinary session of the Human Rights Council on religious freedom.

He said that an "increased proliferation of episodes of discrimination and acts of violence" shows how principles proclaimed in law are being denied in practice.

And religious strife, the archbishop warned, "is a danger to social, political, and economic development. Religious conflict polarizes society, breaking the bonds necessary for social life and commerce to flourish. It produces violence, which robs people of the most fundamental right of all, the right to life. And it sows seeds of distrust and bitterness that can be passed down through the generations."

Referring to the frequency with which Christians are the target of religious hatred (75 out of 100 people killed), the prelate asserted that such a "concentration of religious discrimination should cause concern to all of us."

"But," he added, "the Holy See's purpose in this intervention is to reaffirm the importance of the right to freedom of religion for all individuals, for all communities of faith, and for every society, in all parts of the world."

Duties

Archbishop Tomasi went on to speak of the state's duty to defend freedom of religion and "therefore the responsibility to create an environment where this right can be enjoyed."

There are various duties within this responsibility, he said, including avoiding any religious discrimination, promoting religious tolerance, supporting dialogue initiatives, enforcing laws that fight against religious discrimination, and providing physical security to religious communities under attack.

"Freedom of religion is a value for society as a whole," the Vatican representative affirmed. "The state that protects this right enables society to benefit from the social consequences that come with it: peaceful coexistence, national integration in today's pluralistic situations, increased creativity as

the talents of everyone are placed at the service of the common good. On the other hand, the negation of religious freedom undermines any democratic aspiration, favors oppression, and stifles the whole society that eventually explodes with tragic results."

Understanding

The 70-year-old prelate also called attention to false perceptions regarding religious freedom. He named three.

"[T]he right to express or practice one's religion is not limited to acts of worship," he clarified, adding that services such as health care and education provided through religious institutions are important.

The second misperception regards holding offices or positions of authority: "[F]aith communities have their own rules for qualifications for religious office, and for serving in religious institutions, including charitable facilities. These religious institutions are part of civil society, and not branches of the state. Consequently, the limits that international human rights law places on states regarding qualifications on state office holding and public service do not apply automatically to non-state actors. [...] Religious tolerance includes respecting differences of opinions in these matters, and respecting the difference between a state and a religious institution."

Lastly, Archbishop Tomasi pointed to a "fear that respecting the freedom to choose and practice another religion, different from one's own, is based on a premise that all truth is relative and that one's religion is no longer absolutely valid."

"That is a misunderstanding," he explained. "The right to adopt, and to change, a religion is based on respect for human dignity: the state must allow each person to freely search for the truth."

On ZENIT's Web page:

Full text: www.zenit.org/article-31939?l=english

| [More](#)

© Innovative Media, Inc.

Reprinting ZENIT's articles requires written permission from the [editor](#).