

## **6th session of the Forum on Minority Issues**

### **III. Protection of the existence of and prevention of violence against religious minorities**

Permanent Mission of Austria

Madame chair,

First of all, we would like to congratulate you for your appointment as the chair of the forum which is focusing, this year, on guaranteeing the rights of religious minorities.

As main sponsor on the resolutions on this issue in the Human Rights Council and the General Assembly, Austria has been particularly looking forward to discussing this important issue today. Giving the increasing acts of intolerance and violent attacks against religious minorities and their places of worship in many places of the world, our meeting is timely, indeed.

Austria shares with you that states should have the primary responsibility to protect the human rights and securing the human rights of religious minorities, and to prosecute anyone who commits supports or incites violence against them. In addition, all cases of intimidation, harassment and prosecution, should be truly and immediately investigated. Not only cases of attacks against religious minorities should be investigated and punished, but also, acts of intimidation and other forms of reprisals against advocates supporting religious minorities and their undertaking to realise their rights. With regards to our national framework concerning the security and protection of religious minorities, we would like to emphasize that all churches and religious communities in Austria (...) special protection under the law. Hate speech or hate crimes against persons on cases of religious grounds are equally prosecuted in the criminal law. Facilities and property dedicated to religious services entry and enhance protection. In addition, there are no special restrictions regarding the publication and circulation of religious material. Prevention is key in order to create and maintain a safe and (...) environment for religious minorities. Therefore, the Austrian national action plan on integration provides a series of measures to promote intercultural understanding, which are regularly reviewed and expanded. Religious minority groups are benefiting from those measures. An integration advisory committee composed of representatives of the federal state and the provinces, as well as representatives of the social partners and non-governmental organisations was established to monitor the implementation of this action plan.

Madame chair, it is also central that states take measures to encourage the acknowledge of the belief, history, traditions, language, and culture of religious minorities existing within their territory. In Austria, for instance, confessional religious education is compulsory for those students who belong to one of the 15 officially recognised religious communities within Austria, if the student or his parents do not wish (...). The respect of religious minorities are responsible for implementing, executing, and supervising religious education in schools, while the state is financing their relevant activities. This is an important contribution to protect the right of religious minorities in our country.

Thank you.

