

Declaration by the High Representative, Federica Mogherini, on behalf of the European Union, on the occasion of the International Day Commemorating the Victims of Acts of Violence based on Religion or Belief

On this first International Day commemorating the victims of acts of violence based on religion or belief, we pay tribute to all those around the world who lost their lives and suffered attacks because of their religion or belief. Persecution as a response to religious belief or affiliation, or lack thereof, is a violation of international law and requires joint work to combat it.

There were many tragic extremist attacks during the last year. Believers from any faith, as well as non-believers in many parts of the world continue to suffer from violence and persecution. They face incitement to hatred and violence and hate crimes by state or non-state actors or both.

Freedom of thought, conscience and religion are enshrined in Article 10 of the Charter of Fundamental rights of the European Union and protecting this right is a duty for the EU and its Member States. EU legislation obliges Member States to penalise the intentional public incitement to violence or hatred directed against a group of persons or a member of such a group defined by reference to, among others, religion or belief.

The EU has always been at the frontline in promoting and protecting freedom of religion or belief. The guidelines on the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief approved in 2013, reaffirm that state institutions have a duty to guarantee freedom of religion or belief, and to protect individuals from violence based on the actual or assumed religion or belief of the targeted persons, or based on the religious or convictional tenets of the perpetrators. Violence perpetrated under the pretext of a religious prescription or practice, such as violence against women and girls including "honour" killings, female genital mutilation, child early and forced marriages as well as violence perpetrated against persons based on their sexual orientation or gender identity is also unacceptable.

Majorities in one country are minorities elsewhere. Marginalisation and scapegoating of persons belonging to religious minorities can be an early warning sign of more severe persecution, as well as a wider crackdown on the whole society. Preventive measures are needed to combat religious hatred, incitement and violence related to religious persecution. The EU has and will continue to increase its support for such measures promoting freedom of religion or belief.

Perpetrators need to be held accountable, violence prevented and victims rehabilitated. Tangible progress can be made through multilateralism and collective action. This is why the EU leads a Resolution on freedom of religion or belief at the Human Rights Council and the UN General Assembly every year. If a society allows for the persecution of one minority, it lays the ground for persecution of any community. An attack on one minority is an attack on all of us. This is why we keep committed to acting all together.