



Contribution to the Secretary-General's Report on

**“Combating intolerance against persons
based on religion or belief”**

April 2025

1. On December 17, 2024, the General Assembly adopted the [resolution 79/180](#) “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief.”¹
2. This resolution requests the Secretary-General to submit a report at the General Assembly's eightieth session, based on information from the High Commissioner for Human Rights, on measures taken by States to combat intolerance as set out in resolution 79/180. [A call for contributions](#) was issued to civil society organizations with a submission deadline on April 15, 2025².
3. The European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ) is an international non-governmental organization founded in 1998, dedicated to promoting and protecting human rights in Europe and worldwide. The ECLJ has held special consultative status with the United Nations / ECOSOC since 2007.
4. In this contribution, the ECLJ aims to highlight the increasing religious intolerance in Europe, with a particular focus on the situation of Christians. Across the continent, Christians face increasing hate crimes, legal and social discrimination, restrictions on religious expression, and the desecration of churches and religious sites. Despite this growing trend, anti-Christian acts are often overlooked by EU institutions. Political responses remain weak compared to actions taken to address other forms of religious intolerance.

¹ UNGA, 2024, *Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief*, [A/RES/79/180](#).

² OHCHR, n.d., [Combating intolerance against persons based on religion or belief](#), United Nations.

5. Additional data on anti-Christian incidents can be found in national-level monitoring organizations such as [Laboratorium Wolności](#) in Poland and [Observatorio para la Libertad Religiosa y de Conciencia](#) in Spain. At the EU level, the materials published by the [Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe \(OIDAC\)](#) are also highly relevant.

A. The rise of intolerance and discrimination against Christians in Europe

6. In addition to the international standards protecting human dignity and freedom of religion (cf. art. 18 UDHR, art. 18 ICCPR), that every member state of the EU has adhered to, the EU legal order also defends these values at its core (cf. art. 2 TEU, art. 10 EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, as well as [art. 17 TFEU on Dialogue with churches, and religious and philosophical organisations](#)).

7. Despite these legal guarantees, Christians in Europe face growing levels of hostility³. According to the [2024 Report](#) by the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe (OIDAC), 2,444 anti-Christian hate crimes were recorded across 35 European countries in 2023. These included 232 personal attacks, such as harassment, threats, and physical violence, targeting them because of their Christian identity.⁴ France (950 incidents), the United Kingdom (702 incidents), and Germany (277 politically motivated crimes and an estimated 2,000 cases of property damage) were among the most affected countries⁵. The data shows an increase of 15% in the UK and 105% in Germany compared to the previous year.⁶

8. The OIDAC's [2022/23 Report](#) identified a worrying trend of extremist violence motivated by hostility toward Christianity. The majority of attacks were attributed to radicalized individuals affiliated with far-left movements, including Antifa, radical feminist, and LGBTIQ groups. Attacks were also perpetrated by far-right extremists, radical Islamist actors, and satanist groups. These findings point to a broad spectrum of ideologically motivated violence.⁷

9. Pope Francis has referred to some of the Christian persecution phenomenon as a form of “polite persecution”: a process of nonviolent exclusion that leads to Christians being marginalized from social, cultural, and professional life, even in countries with deep Christian roots⁸. The Commission of the Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union (COMECE) has similarly raised concerns, linking this form of persecution to the spread of “cancel culture”. Legal penalties, job dismissals, and the misuse of anti-discrimination laws are increasingly used to silence or penalize expression of Christian belief. This trend is reinforced by the rise of radical secularism, which increasingly challenges the role of religion in public life.⁹

³ ECLJ, 2023, [No place for hate in Europe ... Except against Christians?](#).

⁴ OIDAC, 2024, [Report 2024](#), p.5.

⁵ Id., pp.8-9.

⁶ Id., p.9. See also: OIDAC, 2023, [Report 2022/23](#), p.12.

⁷ OIDAC, 2023, [Report 2022/23](#), p.13. See also: ECLJ, 2023, op. cit. (n 3).

⁸ COMECE, [Annual Report 2023](#), p.39.

⁹ Ibid. See also: ICC, 2025, [Multiple motives lurk behind Europe’s rise in anti-Christian hate crimes](#).

B. Speaking out against intolerance

10. Although Christians are increasingly the targets of hate crimes and discrimination, intolerance against Christians continues to be overlooked by European institutions. Other forms of religious intolerance have received stronger political responses.¹⁰ For example, in 2015, the EU appointed a coordinator for combating antisemitism¹¹ (See also, the [EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life \(2021-2030\)](#))¹². A coordinator for combating anti-Muslim hatred was also appointed¹³. However, no such coordinator or strategy exists to address anti-Christian hatred, even though Christians remain the most persecuted religious group globally, and the OSCE has documented a notable rise in anti-Christian hate in Europe¹⁴. Why then this choice to “ignore” intolerance against Christians?

11. In response to these concerns, brought before the Commission in 2022¹⁵, the EU Commission stated that it remains committed to fighting all forms of intolerance and that not appointing a coordinator does not mean discriminations against Christians is being ignored or downplayed¹⁶.

12. While this reassurance is welcome, it does not reflect equal treatment. If religious freedom and equality are truly guiding principles, then Christians should benefit from the same institutional protections and “means” as other religious groups. The Commission has pointed to art. 17 TFEU which provides for regular dialogue between the EU and religious communities, as evidence that Christians are included in policy discussions.¹⁷ While this dialogue is valuable, it does not replace the need for a dedicated coordinator. A coordinator would bring needed visibility, strategic focus, and political weight to address anti-Christian intolerance effectively¹⁸. The absence of such a position creates a disparity in institutional support that may amount to indirect discrimination against Christians.

13. There is a failure to recognize intolerance against Christian with the same urgency as other forms of religious tolerance. The absence of a coordinator further reflects a broader pattern of under-recognition. A 2022 study on [The Global Faith and Media](#) found that media environments often underreport issues related to faith and religion¹⁹. For example, underreporting of anti-Christian violence, public indifference and misrepresentations against

¹⁰ ECLJ, 2023, op. cit. (n 3).

¹¹ European Parliament, 2022, *Surge in anti-Christian hate in Europe and in France*, [Parliamentary question E-001070/2022](#).

¹² European Commission, n.d., [About the EU strategy on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life \(2021-2030\)](#).

¹³ European Commission, n.d., [Combating anti-Muslim hatred](#).

¹⁴ European Parliament, 2022, *Surge in anti-Christian hate in Europe and in France*, [Parliamentary question E-001070/2022](#).

¹⁵ European Commission, 2022, *Answer given by Mr Reynders on behalf of the European Commission*, [Parliamentary question E-001070/2022\(ASW\)](#).

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Art. 17 TFEU. See also: European Parliament, 2024, Art. 17 TFEU: [Dialogue with churches, and religious and philosophical organizations](#), Think Tank European Parliament.

¹⁸ European Commission, n.d., op. cit. (n 12 & 13).

¹⁹ Faith and Media Initiative, 2022, *The global faith and media study*, [A groundbreaking study of attitudes and perceptions regarding faith and religion in the media](#).

Christians²⁰. This lack of visibility contributes to the perception that anti-Christian hostility is either exaggerated or non-existent.

14. **The ECLJ, together with the COMECE²¹ and some Members of the European Parliament (MEPs)²², believe the time is ripe for the appointment of an EU Coordinator on combating anti-Christian hatred and hope to see the UN help in pushing this agenda.** Notably, MEP Jean-Paul Garraud reiterated this call in a recent parliamentary question (8 February 2025), in which he highlighted the alarming statistics and asked the European Commission what measures it plans to take, and whether it intends to finally appoint a coordinator. As of yet, the Commission has not responded²³.

C. Hate crimes, attacks and vandalism

15. Christians across the OSCE region are increasingly targeted in hate crimes. These incidents range from graffiti and vandalism to physical assaults, including attacks on individuals distributing religious materials²⁴. These are not isolated acts, but part of a wider pattern of hostility toward Christian communities. In France, for example, Christianity remains the primary target of anti-religious acts²⁵.

16. Some believe it's inappropriate to focus on anti-Christian hate crimes in Western countries when, elsewhere in the world, Christians face far more extreme persecution, such as being killed in Nigeria, disappearing in North Korea, or enduring daily fear and hostility in Pakistan²⁶. However, it is essential to understand that people should be able to discuss, condemn and ask for better treatment, regardless of where intolerance and persecution occurs. It should not be seen with a comparative approach but rather with a consistent moral concern that recognizes the dignity and rights of individuals everywhere, regardless of the severity or location of the abuse.

17. Recent cases illustrate the rising threat of violence and discrimination. In January 2023, a terrorist attack in Algeciras, Spain, left one altar server dead and four others injured. The assailant reportedly shouted, "Death to Christians" and "Allah is great" during the attack.²⁷ In February 2025, a Catholic priest was attacked by 2 people in France, his religion was insulted and then he got beaten up²⁸. Similarly, a nun in Rome was punched and slapped after trying to

²⁰ Get The Trolls Out!, 2024, [Discrimination and negative stereotyping of Christians in the media by OIDAC Europe](#).

²¹ COMECE, 2024, [COMECE at the European Parliament: "Time is mature for the appointment of an EU Coordinator on combating anti-Christian hatred"](#). Press release.

²² European Parliament, 2024, [Compte rendu in extenso des débats – session du 10 octobre 2024](#). Transcript. See also: Le Salon Beige, 2025, [Au Parlement Européen, il existe un poste de coordinateur contre l'antisémitisme et l'islamophobie. Rien sur la christianophobie](#).

²³ European Parliament, 2025, [Increase in criminal acts against Catholic churches, Parliamentary question E-000584/2025](#).

²⁴ OSCE, n.d., [Anti-Christian Hate Crime](#), ODIHR, p.1.

²⁵ ECLJ, 2023, [The European Union must face the rise of anti-Christian acts!](#)

²⁶ ICC, 2025, [Multiple motives lurk behind Europe's rise in anti-Christian hate crimes](#).

²⁷ ABS España, 2023, [Las víctimas del ataque en Algeciras: un sacristán es el muerto y un sacerdote, el herido estable dentro de la gravedad](#).

²⁸ Valeurs Actuelles, 2025, [\[Info VA\] Auxerre : un prêtre insulté et tabassé près de l'église Saint-Eusèbe](#).

push away the attacker²⁹. These examples reflect a disturbing escalation of hostility toward Christian communities.

18. In 2024, over 750 church thefts were recorded, and that only in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany³⁰, one among many affected. Similar acts of vandalism and desecration have occurred in France³¹, Italy³², Spain³³, Greece³⁴...³⁵ In March 2025, several churches in Germany's Kraichgau region were damaged: windows smashed, someone apparently defecated in the pulpit and covered it with an open Bible, pages down³⁶. In France, as well, crushed candles, torn liturgical books, displaced bench, broken vases...³⁷ In Hungary, February 2025, a church building was vandalized with the phrase "God is dead" and antifa symbols painted on the walls³⁸. In essence, these acts are not only property damages but deeply wound the communities that worship there. Church arsons, which occur with disturbing frequency, should also be condemned³⁹.

19. In March 2025, the ECLJ submitted observations in the case of *Czerski v. Poland* ([Request n°55654/21](#)) currently before the ECtHR⁴⁰. This case highlights a broader trend of attacks against Christian symbols and figures. Between 2019 and 2023, 42 acts targeting the cult of Saint Jean-Paul II were recorded in Poland, including vandalism of statues, desecration of relics, physical aggression against individuals defending religious monuments. In the present case, Czerski deliberately vandalized a statue of Jean Paul II as a form of protest. The ECLJ affirms that freedom of expression does not include the right to desecrate religious symbols. Acts of targeted hostility under the guise of protests must be distinguished from legitimate expression.⁴¹

20. The ECtHR should respect the authority of national courts to uphold public order and protect religious freedom. In this case, alternative avenues (to vandalizing) for expression were clearly available. Despite Czerski's arrest and conviction, his actions were widely imitated, showing how symbolic violence against Christianity is being normalized. Prior to 2019, only one such incident against Jean Paul II was recorded there and it was in 2013, now it amounts to 42 between 2019 and 2023. Revealing a clear increase and "normalization" of anti-Christian vandalism and intolerance.⁴²

²⁹ NewsMondo, 2024, [Terrificante : suora pestata a calci e pugni da un nigeriano in una chiesa](#).

³⁰ Westdeutsche Zeitung, 2025, [Innenministerium: 753 Diebstähle in Kirchen](#).

³¹ Le Figaro, 2024, [Incendies, profanations, vols... Ce vandalisme contre les églises qui « participe à l'angoisse identitaire des Français »](#).

³² FoggiaToday, 2025, [Incastrato dalle telecamere: aveva rubato denaro nella sagrestia di una chiesa](#).

See also: PalermoToday, 2025, [Rubati calice e ostie nella chiesa di Borgo Nuovo, padre Garau: "Violentata la nostra parrocchia"](#).

³³ El Samanal de la Mancha, 2025, [Roban en la iglesia de San Francisco de Alcázar de San Juan](#).

³⁴ Ekathimerini, 2025, [Theft at religious sites reaches record levels](#).

³⁵ The examples sourced are recent articles but the data is overwhelming on such acts against churches

³⁶ Badische Neueste Nachrichten, 2025, [Kirchenschändung in Kürnbach: Altarbibel und Osterkerze mit Fäkalien beschmiert](#).

³⁷ Le Télégramme, 2025, [Vandalisme à l'église Notre-Dame des Flots et cambriolages à Treffiat - Léchiagat : la municipalité appelle à la vigilance](#).

³⁸ OIDAC, 2025, [Baptist church vandalised with Antifa](#).

³⁹ Le Journal du Dimanche, 2025, [Les incendies criminels d'églises en hausse de 30% en 2024](#).

⁴⁰ ECLJ, 2025, [Written observations : Czerski v. Poland \(No. 55654/21\)](#).

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

D. Freedom of religion and expression

21. Freedom of conscience and expression are essential components of democratic societies and are closely linked to the protection of religious belief. In its [Resolution](#) 2036 (2015), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) explicitly calls on its member States to “*uphold freedom of conscience in the workplace*”⁴³ and “*the fundamental right to freedom of expression by ensuring national legislation does not unduly limit religiously motivated speech.*”⁴⁴ This fundamental right is echoed in the European Economic and Social Committee’s (EESC) 2024 opinion on the Commission communication “No place for hate”⁴⁵ which stresses that freedom of expression must be preserved and safeguarded, even while fighting hate⁴⁶. However, in practice, Christian beliefs and speech are increasingly being criminalized or censored,⁴⁷ especially when they conflict with dominant ideologies related to sexuality, gender, and family.

22. Christians continue to face discrimination because of their beliefs⁴⁸. Traditional Christian beliefs that have been held for millennia, such as the belief that God created human beings, male and female, for each other, may be labelled as discriminatory. As shows by the case of Maureen Martin who was fired for saying that marriage should be between a man and a woman.⁴⁹ She then sued her employer and won for unfair dismissal, discrimination and harassment⁵⁰. A similar case is pending before UK courts as Ms. G. Soydag appealed to a tribunal ruling which denied her right to free speech, she was also let go from her position at the St Anne’s Catholic High School for Girls, for promoting traditional beliefs on marriage⁵¹.

23. While some national courts have ultimately upheld Christians’ right to free expression⁵², the broader trend is concerning. A growing number of individuals face suspension, dismissal, or disciplinary action due to religious convictions⁵³. These developments disproportionately impact the *forum externum*, the public manifestation of religion, and creates a chilling effect, discouraging individuals from expressing their beliefs even when those beliefs are protected by law. Indeed, while Christians may win when appealing the decisions, the simple fact that the matter may be brought before a Court has a chilling effect.

⁴³ PACE, 2015, [Resolution](#) 2036, *Tackling intolerance and discrimination in Europe with a special focus on Christians*, §6.2.2.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, §6.4.

⁴⁵ European Commission, 2023, Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council, [No place for hate: a Europe united against hatred](#).

⁴⁶ European Economic and Social Committee, 2024, [No place for hate: a Europe united against hatred](#), §1.8.

⁴⁷ FSSPX News, 2024, [For the European Union, anti-Christian hate is negligible](#). See also: Tomorrow’s World, 2010, [The criminalization of Christianity](#).

⁴⁸ OIDAC, 2024, [Report 2024](#), p.48.

⁴⁹ MailOnline, 2023, [Christian and ex-London mayor hopeful who was fired for saying marriage should be between a man and a woman wins substantial damages for unfair dismissal, discrimination and harassment](#).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ The Telegraph, 2024, [School counsellor sacked for ‘misogynist views on traditional marriage’](#). See also: Christian Concern, 2025, [School pastoral manager to appeal ruling as judge says traditional nuclear family cannot be celebrated on social media without fear of sack](#).

⁵² Christian Concern, 2025, [Kristie Higgs wins as Court of Appeal rules dismissal for free speech is illegal](#). See also: BBC, 2025, [Trainee midwife suspended over anti-abortion views](#).

⁵³ CIDAC, 2024, [Report for CIDAC Panel: Ben Dybowski \(BD\)](#). See also: BBC, 2025, [Trainee midwife suspended over anti-abortion views](#).

24. The ECLJ also wishes to raise concerns about laws that criminalize peaceful attempts to “influence” abortion decisions near abortion facilities, commonly referred to as “buffer zones”⁵⁴. While recognizing women’s right to privacy and dignity, it is also essential to uphold the superseding right to life and freedom of expression. Silence prayers and calls for consensual conversations are being criminalized⁵⁵. In the UK, Isabel Vaughan-Spruce was approached by police for silently praying in a public place. She was asked to leave (a public area) because of what she is known to believe, her presence deemed offensive due to her known pro-life views.⁵⁶ She later stated:

*“Every person has a right to stand in a public space and think what they want. The police officer told me that my “mere presence” was offensive – that’s nothing short of viewpoint discrimination. He believes that just because I hold pro-life beliefs, I am automatically a criminal in certain public areas. This isn’t right.”*⁵⁷

*“[Y]ou cannot break the law by simply existing in a buffer zone, holding thoughts and beliefs in your mind.”*⁵⁸

25. In Scotland, pro-life advocates have expressed concern about the mechanism enshrined in §7 of the Abortion Services (Safe Access Zones) Act 2024⁵⁹, fearing further expansion of the buffer zones, thus reinforcing the criminalization of peaceful religious expression⁶⁰.

26. These cases raise a critical legal and ethical question: where is the line between protected *external* expression and unlawful hate speech? If Christians statements were considered hate speech, only then would they be lawfully censored. However, under international and European law, speech must incite hatred or violence to justify criminal sanctions. The ECtHR has affirmed that not every remark perceived as offensive warrants a conviction. In *Gaspari v. Armenia (2023)*, the Court held that “*not every remark which may be perceived as offensive or insulting by particular individuals or groups justifies a criminal conviction*”⁶¹. Similarly, in *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia (2022)*, the Court reaffirmed that religious opinions remain protected even when countercultural or unpopular, unless they directly promotes hatred or violence⁶².

27. Against this jurisprudence, the testimony of Isabel Vaughan-Spruce shows how the vague standard of “offence” can be unlawfully used to suppress peaceful opposition. It reflects a marginalization of Christian voices.

⁵⁴ Example: Scottish Parliament, 2024, [Abortion Services \(Safe Access Zones\)\(Scotland\) Act 2024, asp.10](#).

⁵⁵ BBC, 2025, [Anti-abortion group will not break buffer zones](#). See also: BBC, 2024, [Carmarthen preacher Stephen Green fined for abortion clinic protest](#).

⁵⁶ ADF International, 2025, [Police target charitable volunteer AGAIN for standing silently in public area](#).

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Scottish Parliament, 2024, [Abortion Services \(Safe Access Zones\)\(Scotland\) Act 2024, asp.10](#), §7.

⁶⁰ OIADC, 2025, [Christian prayer leader first charged under Scotland’s buffer zone law](#).

⁶¹ ECtHR, *Gaspari v. Armenia* (no. 2), 2023, § 27).

⁶² ECtHR, *Taganrog LRO and Others v. Russia*, 2022, §§ 145,149, 153-154.

E. The role of governments and institutions

28. Governments play a central role in combating religious intolerance and ensuring equal protection for all faiths. However, evidence suggests that some European governments apply inconsistent standards, particularly in the enforcement of hate speech and blasphemy-related laws. For example, during the summer of 2023, the public desecration of the Quran in Sweden and Denmark provoked a wave of international outrage, including riots, attacks on embassies,⁶³ and later, assassination⁶⁴. In response, Denmark passed legislation criminalizing the desecration of sacred texts, including the Bible and the Torah. Yet in July 2023, when copies of the Bible and Torah were publicly burned in Copenhagen, authorities permitted the demonstration, and the incident attracted little public or political reaction.⁶⁵

29. This uneven enforcement raises concerns about double standards. In Sweden, an ex-Muslim was reportedly killed following a public Quran burning, in what appeared to be a retaliatory act⁶⁶. In the UK, where blasphemy laws have been abolished⁶⁷, incidents involving the Quran have nonetheless prompted immediate police action⁶⁸. One troubling example involved an autistic boy who scratched a Quran. Receiving threats, his mother was compelled to publicly apologizing at a local mosque to appease the Muslim community.⁶⁹

30. These cases demonstrate a broader pattern: when Christianity is insulted or attacked, public and institutional reaction tend to be muted. In contrast, perceived offences against Islam often generate immediate and serious consequences. As author Noel Yaxley has noted, the term “Islamophobia” is increasingly framed as form of racism⁷⁰, which can make criticism of religious ideas harder to voice. However, Islam is a belief system, not an ethnicity or racial group, and criticism of any ideology, including religious ones, should remain permissible in a democratic society. As N. Yaxley points out, confusing race with ideas is an effective tactic to silence opposition.⁷¹

31. At the same time, some civil activist efforts have also targeted Christian practices directly. In Poland, a petition was submitted to Parliament calling for a ban on the sacrament of confession for minors, describing it as “traumatic”⁷². Such proposals, if adopted, would severely impact religious freedom.

32. In the UK, the government introduced a 20% VAT on private school fees, effective in January 2025⁷³. This measure poses serious financial challenges for many Christian schools,

⁶³ Midi Libre, 2023, [Nouveau Coran brûlé au Danemark : "un millier de manifestants" tentent de prendre d'assaut l'ambassade en réaction aux autodafés.](#)

⁶⁴ Le Monde, 2025, [En Suède, un Irakien qui a brûlé le Coran à plusieurs reprises abattu dans son appartement.](#)

⁶⁵ Atlantico, 2025, [Ce retour insidieux du blasphème que l'Europe promeut en cédant aux exigences de l'islam politique.](#)

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ UK Public General Acts, 2008, *Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008*, c.4, [Section 79](#).

⁶⁸ Atlantico, 2025, op. cit. (n 64).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Aleteia, 2025, [En Pologne, une pétition pour supprimer la confession des mineurs.](#)

⁷³ Stevens & Bolton, 2025, [Brace for impact: what the new VAT on private school fees means for your family.](#)

some of which are already struggling to remain open⁷⁴. As a result, families may be forced to withdraw their children or take on unaffordable expenses⁷⁵. This raises concerns under [art. 18\(4\) ICCPR](#), [GC22](#)⁷⁶ and [art. 2 Protocol No.1 to the ECHR](#), which protect the right of parent to ensure the religious and moral education of their children in accordance with their convictions.

33. In Belarus, religious discrimination is evident within the prison system. Prisoners deemed “low status” are reportedly denied access to clergy, religious literature, and worship services⁷⁷. This practice violates the spirit of the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners ([the Nelson Mandela Rules](#)), in particular Rule 65⁷⁸. While non-binding, these rules were adopted by consensus⁷⁹, underscoring their legitimacy. Despite clear violations, notably on religious freedom for Christians, Belarusian authorities have failed to address the situation⁸⁰.

34. Finally, Christian expression is also affected by legislation, such as the EU Digital Services Act (DSA). While aimed at combatting online hate and disinformation, it contains vague language on “hate speech” and “harmful content” that could be used to suppress peaceful religious expression⁸¹. One example is the Hallow app, a widely used Christian prayer platform, which has faced pressure over alleged regulatory non-compliance⁸². According to its CEO, Christian content is at risk of being “overregulated” in Europe, just as the app was recently removed from app stores in China⁸³.

Beneath its stated goal of protecting democracy lies a potential erosion of fundamental freedoms⁸⁴. As Pope Francis has warned, this kind of “polite persecution”, through bureaucratic pressure and legal mechanisms, quietly silences religious voices without drawing public outrage.

35. The ECLJ urges the Secretary-General and Member States to recognize and address the rising intolerance faced by Christians in Europe. This growing trend, evident in hate crimes, legal restrictions, media underreporting, and unequal institutional responses, threatens fundamental rights to freedom of religion, expression, and conscience. We respectfully call for the UN to support in pushing for the equal applications of protections afforded to all religious groups, including the appointment of a dedicated EU Coordinator on anti-Christian hatred, the safeguarding of religious expression in public life, and the protection of places of worship.

⁷⁴ BBC, 2024, [Christian schools’ legal challenge against VAT on fees](#).

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ OHCHR, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.4, General Comment No.22, §§ 4, 6.

⁷⁷ Forum 18, 2025, [Belarus: «Low status» prisoners denied prison church visits](#).

⁷⁸ UNODC, 2015, [The United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners \(the Nelson Mandela Rules\)](#), (A/RES/70/175), Rule 65.

⁷⁹ UNGA, 2016, [Resolutions and Decisions adopted by the General Assembly during its 70th session](#), A/RES/70/175. Adopted « without a vote », meaning no formal objections were made.

⁸⁰ See joint letter sent by the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the SR on the situation of human rights in Belarus, the SR on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression; the independent Expert on the enjoyment of all human rights by older person and the ST on freedom of religion or belief, in [2022, Letter](#). See also: Forum 18, 2025, [Belarus: «Low status» prisoners denied prison church visits](#).

⁸¹ ADF International, 2025, [How the EU Digital Services Act \(DSA\) Affects Online Free Speech in 2025](#).

⁸² ICC, 2025, [Christian prayer app “Hallow” banned in Europe](#).

⁸³ CEO & Co-Founder of Hallow, [@alexathallow], 2025, [Tweet on: x.com](#).

⁸⁴ ADF International, 2025, op. cit. (n 80).

All online sources were last accessed on April 4, 2025.