

Continent is 'hostile to religious freedom'

A Vatican diplomat has claimed there is a growing lack of religious freedom in Europe and warned countries against violating religious rights.



“The Holy See has always worked to ensure that, within international relations, respect is shown for the values of faith and inviolability of each person's conscience,” said Archbishop Antoine Camilleri, Under-Secretary for Relations with States. “This is an area which calls for attention in the present national and international context, faced with a culture that seems to regard belief and the religious dimension as superfluous, restricting these to acts of worship or rituals permitted by civil authorities.”

The 49-year-old Maltese diplomat was addressing the 57 member countries of the Organisation for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE), at a meeting marking 40 years since principles of religious freedom were enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. He said the act, signed when Europe was divided, had introduced “a structure of rules, institutions and programmes” that benefited both peoples and states.

However, its notion of rights was being undermined, Archbishop Camilleri told the OSCE. “The right to seek God, and thus find in religious faith the inspiration for moral conduct, is a freedom belonging both to individuals and to communities of believers. This freedom cannot be marginalised or excluded from social life,” he said.

The Vatican, represented by then-Archbishop Agostino Casaroli, was a co-drafter of the Final Act, which listed “respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief” among 10 inter-state principles.

