

EUROPEAN EXTERNAL ACTION SERVICE



THE HEAD OF DIVISION

DIRECTORATE North Africa, Middle East, Arabian Peninsula,
Iran and Iraq

DIVISION Middle East I – Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria

Brussels, 04 AVR. 2012
EEAS/LH/lj

Dear Petitioner,

Thank you for your letter dated 12 February, imparting your concern about the situation of Christians in Syria. The High Representative and Vice President of the European Commission Catherine Ashton asked me to reply on her behalf.

Your petition raises a critical issue that the EU has consistently addressed since violence first erupted in Syria in March 2011. In its messages to the regime, the EU has condemned in the strongest terms the ongoing brutal repression and widespread human rights violations and reiterated the request to uphold the principles of freedom of religion and belief and to refrain from sectarian and ethnic division.

In addition, it has repeatedly urged the Syrian opposition to agree on a set of principles for working towards a Syria where all citizens enjoy equal rights regardless of their affiliations, ethnicities or beliefs and reaffirmed its support to the Syrian people and their aspirations for a democratic Syria respectful of the rights of all its communities.

In the same vein, the High Representative Catherine Ashton has in her statements condemned all acts aimed at inciting interethnic and inter-confessional conflict and affirmed that she stands with the Syrian people as they seek the respect of fundamental rights of individuals regardless of their religion or belief.

As a universal human right, Freedom of religion or belief is a priority under the EU's human rights policy. The EU uses its full range of diplomatic and cooperation instruments to address the issue on a bilateral basis. It has also recourse to multilateral engagement in international fora to gather consensus on freedom of religion and belief standards and against religious intolerance and violence. The EU will remain mobilised so to ensure that freedom of religion and belief is protected everywhere and for everyone.

Yours sincerely,



Ilkka UUSITALO