

**Security Council debate on**

**The victims of attacks and abuses on ethnic or religious ground in  
the Middle East**

**Statement**

**by Mr Tim Mawe**

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***[Check against delivery]***

Mr President,

I would like to thank France as Council President for organising today's debate on this important subject. Ireland aligns itself with the statement delivered earlier on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

I would also, at the outset, like to thank the speakers who have provided first hand testimony here of the persecution they have suffered for their beliefs.

Mr President,

Ireland's Minister for Foreign Affairs Charles Flanagan, in his address to the General Assembly last September, condemned all forms of persecution or discrimination based on religion or belief, and specifically highlighted the persecution of religious minorities in the Middle East as well as the rise of anti-Semitic attacks in European countries.

However, as we have heard today, attacks on individuals and communities for their religious beliefs or ethnic backgrounds have become a tragically regular occurrence. While this phenomenon is seen across the globe, it has taken a particularly virulent and deadly form in a number of countries in the Middle East. The breakdown of established state and community structures, and the emergence of radical groups with seemingly unfettered access to arms, has significantly increased the vulnerability of minorities across the region.

The Middle East, birthplace to many of the world's most significant religions, remains the homeland of many diverse religious communities. The descent of Syria, Iraq and Libya into violence and disarray has left numerous religious

minorities exposed to violence. Recent atrocities include the despicable murder of 21 Egyptian Copts in Libya, the kidnapping of more than 150 Assyrian Christians in eastern Syria, the massacre of Shiite worshippers at mosques in Saana, as well as the ongoing abuse of Yezidi women at the hands of ISIL. Such acts are entirely abhorrent.

These and other actions jeopardise the survival of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious character of the Middle East, and the prospect for inclusive stability in the long-term. The fact that many of the perpetrators of the violence claim to do so in the name of religion only exacerbates the situation.

While many countries, especially in the neighbourhood, have provided refuge for individuals and groups, the relocation of entire communities is not the answer. It is essential to preserve communities where they have survived, in many cases since antiquity. It is where they belong and where they have a right to belong.

The protection of fundamental rights for all communities, including the very many Muslims victimised by religious persecution and terrorism across the wider Middle East, is a fundamental duty of all States in the region.

As the Representative of the European Union said earlier, “Respect for human rights, promotion of inclusive and democratic societies and support to vibrant civil societies is the only way to guarantee full security and full stability for all people in the region.”

The international community must also bear its responsibility. The United Nations must utilise all tools at its disposal to protect vulnerable communities, and to ensure that those who have the capacity fulfil their obligations.

Mr. President, we must also pay special attention to the role of women, both as victims of extremism but also as agents of transformative change. Just two weeks ago in New York, Ireland partnered with El Karama, a platform of women's organisations from the Middle East and North African region, in highlighting the need to expand the influence of Arab women as leaders. Inspiring women from Syria, Libya and Sudan spoke to rooms filled to capacity and brought a very clear message with them: Women must be included at the highest levels, from peace and reconciliation negotiations, to post-conflict decision-making, to representation in the formation of new constitutions.

We must now act on their message.

Ireland is committed to defending the right to freedom of religion or belief and seeks to ensure that focussed attention is given to this issue, including through our current membership of the Human Rights Council.

Finally, as we continue work on the post-2015 development agenda we must recognise the strong linkages between peace, development and respect for human rights. And while we work to counter the current series of attacks and abuses, the longer-term challenge to us all is in giving effect to a development agenda in a manner that systematically tackles the root causes of such attacks.

Thank you.

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