



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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3069th Council meeting

Foreign Affairs

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President

Catherine ASHTON

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and
Security Policy

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OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

A number of other items were adopted without discussion:

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Intolerance, discrimination and violence on the basis of religion and belief

Following its discussion at its January meeting, the Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council reaffirms the strong commitment of the European Union to the promotion and protection of freedom of religion or belief without any discrimination, and recalls the comprehensive conclusions it adopted in this respect on 16 November 2009.

The Council expresses its profound concern about the increasing number of acts of religious intolerance and discrimination, as epitomised by recent violence and acts of terrorism, in various countries, against Christians and their places of worship, Muslim pilgrims and other religious communities, which it firmly condemns. Regrettably, no part of the world is exempt from the scourge of religious intolerance.

The Council expresses its condolences and solidarity to the countries and individual victims of such acts and pays tribute to the commitment of countries to prevent them.

Freedom of religion or belief is a universal human right which needs to be protected everywhere and for everyone. It is the primary duty of States to protect their citizens, including persons belonging to religious minorities, as well as all people living in their jurisdiction, and safeguard their rights. All persons belonging to religious communities and minorities should be able to practice their religion and worship freely, individually or in community with others, without fear of intolerance and attacks.

Freedom of religion or belief is intrinsically linked to freedom of opinion and expression as well as to other human rights and fundamental freedoms, which all contribute to the building of pluralist and democratic societies. The international community needs to consolidate its collective response to those who want to use religion as an instrument of division, fuelling extremism and violence.

As part of the enhanced EU efforts in its bilateral and multilateral action on freedom of religion or belief, the EU and its Member States remain committed to the realisation of the freedom of religion or belief in all parts of the world, which will be addressed in the annual EU human rights reports. The EU will continue to engage with partner countries and offer its cooperation to promote religious tolerance and to protect human rights. The EU will engage further in multilateral fora, in particular the UN, to rally strong cross-regional support in the fight against religious intolerance.

The EU and its Member States will continue to support initiatives in the field of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in the spirit of openness, engagement and mutual understanding, including by the UN Alliance of Civilisations, UNESCO and the Anna Lindh Foundation.

The Council welcomes the ongoing efforts to enhance EU action to promote and protect freedom of religion or belief following the 2009 Council Conclusions. The Council invites the High Representative to report on the measures taken and on concrete proposals to further strengthen the EU action in this regard."