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Oral Statement submitted to the European Centre for Law and Justice (ECLJ)
Report of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief

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Mr. President,

The ECLJ as an NGO that specializes in defending religious freedom has noted with great attention the report of Ms. Jahangir and wishes to congratulate her.

Concerning her report on freedom of religion and belief in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, the ECLJ appreciates that special attention has been devoted to the situation of the Christian community in this region. This report rightly denounces the obstacles to freedom of worship and the religious intolerance that targets the Christian minority in many extends. This intolerance is a major cause of the mass exodus of Christian populations of the Holy Land. Under many scopes of concern, as denounced by the report, Christians are the target of violence and systematic discrimination. Even worse is the situation of hundreds of people who converted to Christianity: they must not only live their religion in secret, but their very life is threatened.

As in other countries, the rights and freedoms of religious minorities can only be usefully defended and protected with the support of the international law and instruments. International law, as it does exist today, protects the rights of minorities against the abuses and the violence of the majorities. The current wording of human rights in the field of religion and expression, because it primarily protects the rights of the “weak” against the violence of the “strong”, forms a dam against the expansion of fundamentalism. On this point, we must support the work of the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief.

However, the ECLJ is deeply concerned about by the current attempt to redefine human rights on religion and expression. The ECLJ is of the opinion that the consideration of the report of Ms. Asma Jahangir should not be used in order to introduce a new interpretation of the freedoms of religion and expression, in order in order, not any more to protect the rights of the minorities, but of the majorities against the minorities.

Indeed, to accept the "defamation of religions" pushed by the OIC would provide an international legitimacy to the repressive laws against the religious minorities, such as laws against proselytizing and against blasphemy. It should be recalled that in too many countries, the only public expression of the content of the religion of a minority, often Christian, is considered as an offense, as a "blasphemy" against the state religion. In consequence, the recognition of the concept of "defamation of religions", would in fact strengthen the repressive legislation against religious minorities.

The discussion of the Report of Ms. Jahangir should rather have to give the opportunity to condemn, once again, the intolerance and religious persecution.