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Christian communities could disappear from the Middle East, warns PACE

Strasbourg, 27.01.2011 – Christian communities could disappear from the Middle East, where Christianity had its beginnings, if low birth rates and emigration – fuelled in some places by discrimination and persecution – are not properly addressed, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) has warned.

In a recommendation adopted today, based on a report by Luca Volontè (Italy, EPP/CD), the Assembly unequivocally condemned the October 2010 massacre of worshippers in the Syriac Catholic cathedral in Baghdad and the January 2011 suicide bombing in a Coptic church in Alexandria as two “particularly tragic” events in a growing number of attacks on Christian communities worldwide.

The parliamentarians said the co-existence of religious groups was a sign of pluralism and an environment favourable to the development of democracy and human rights: “The Assembly is convinced that the loss of Christian communities in the Middle East would also endanger Islam as it would signal the victory of fundamentalism.”

Relations between Christian communities in the Middle East and the Muslim majorities “have not always been easy”, the Assembly said, while public authorities in some Muslim countries “have not always conveyed the right signals” about other religious communities in these countries.

The Assembly called for a Council of Europe strategy to enforce “freedom of religion” – including the freedom to change one’s religion – as a human right. Member states should also promote educational material which addressed anti-Christian stereotypes and bias as well as “Christianophobia” in general.

They should also insist on a “democracy clause” when making agreements with third countries, and take account of the situation of Christian and other religious communities in their bilateral political dialogue with these countries.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 318 members from the national parliaments of the 47 member states.

President: Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu (Turkey, EDG) - Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political groups: EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); SOC (Socialist Group); EDG (European Democrat Group); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).