



World Council of Churches

General Secretariat

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Geneva, May 1, 2013

Mr. Heiner Bielefeldt
Special Rapporteur on Freedom of
Religion or Belief
United Nations Human Rights
Council
Geneva, Switzerland

Your Excellency,

Kindly accept my cordial greetings!

The World Council of Churches would like to express its concern on the methodology followed and on the reliability of the results of the 2011 Census in Albania, regarding the optional question of religious affiliation. The latest official report of INSTAT, regarding the religious identity of the population, from the 2011 Census declares that Orthodox Christians in Albania are 6.75% and that the overall number of Christians has been drastically reduced from 31% to 17%.

The restoration of religious life in all the traditional religious communities and especially the flourishing of the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, in the years since the coming of democracy in 1991, after the long antireligious persecution, are quite evident throughout the country. The Orthodox Church possesses evidence (baptismal registers, from both before and after the persecution, and the registers of 460 Orthodox parishes throughout the country) that the number of Orthodox Christians in Albania exceeds 24% of the population.

Following the results of the Census, the Orthodox Church of Albania distributed a questionnaire regarding the Census to Orthodox participants at liturgies held on two Sundays, December 9 and 16, 2012 in Tirana, Durrës, Berat, Korçë, Vlorë, and other cities. The results were disturbing: 7,118 persons completed the questionnaire which included their first and last names and their address. Of these only 2,469 persons or 34.68% declared that they were visited and questioned regarding their religious affiliation during the Census; 4,643 persons or 65.23% were not visited or when visited were not asked about their religious affiliation by registrars of the Census; 56 persons declared that the registrars wrote information in pencil or not in the official form and an additional eleven persons testified that the registrars refused to record religious affiliation or did so only under significant pressure. Moreover they received testimonies that in a large number of cases citizens were not asked to sign the Census form and that information was written in a notebook rather than on the official form as procedure required. The results of this questionnaire show that in 65% of the cases there were irregularities in the Census taken with regard to religious affiliation.

It is worth mentioning that according to the Council of Europe (“Third Opinion of the Council of Europe on Albania adopted 23.11.2011,”) the population census *“cannot be considered to be reliable and accurate, raises issues of compatibility with the principles enshrined in Article 3 of the Framework Convention for the protection of national minorities...’*.

The Constitution of Albania guarantees freedom of religion or belief. Article 3 charges the state with ensuring religious coexistence. Article 20 restates protection for minority religious rights and freedoms. Furthermore, Albania is a signatory to international human rights instruments guarantying freedom of religion or belief.

Having full confidence in your work for the respect, protection and promotion of freedom of religion or belief around the world, we urge you, Prof. Dr. Bielefeld, to use your good offices to ensure that freedom of religion or belief for all citizens of Albania, is fully respected.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Olav Fykse Tveit". The signature is written in a cursive, somewhat stylized script.

Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit
General Secretary