

UPF Portugal: Safety in Places of Worship - Lusófona University, Lisbon

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The meeting was attended not only by the presence of UPF Portugal, as a member of the working group, but also by representatives of the Islamic faith, Portuguese Evangelical Alliance, Jehovah's Witnesses, Church of Jesus Christ of the Last Days, Candomblé, Taoism and others not identified.

After a brief introduction by Prof. Paulo Oliveira, the floor was given to Prof. Paulo M. Pinto, who presented the Prosecurw Project (Protecting Places of Worship). Prosecurw is a project adopted by different European countries, given the increasing levels of violence faced by the many new religious communities from non-EU countries.

A survey was carried out to assess safety in places of worship in Portugal, consisting of only three questions and aimed exclusively at religious leaders, excluding community members. During the meeting, the result was presented, which allowed the following conclusion:

- Religious freedom is increasingly presented as a relevant topic. It raises the question of the significant difference between real religious freedom and the perception of its practitioners and the general population.
- A study in different evangelical churches highlights a "religious freedom" legislated but not practiced.
- In Portugal, the perception that no religious persecution does not correspond to reality. This perception is due to insufficient religious diversity, capable of leading to confrontation.
- Social peace in Portugal, as it is so evident, deserves an attentive and careful analysis. The absence or low incidence of physical violence masks the growing violence carried out with impunity through different social networks. The internet was identified as a space of great religious violence.
- Despite all this, most religious leaders feel very secure.
- Good security was recognized in public spaces, with increased emphasis on worship spaces.
- Religious leaders did not recognize religious security as needing further investment.

After the presentation of the survey results, the debate was opened. Of the various interventions, the awareness stood out that the "mild Portuguese customs" depend on the perception (not real) that the different religious communities present in the national territory are not, yet, a threat. However, the European model warns of a change in the population's attitude when the perception is that of a "threat".

The number of emigrants and the respective mode of emigration are fundamental factors that require careful and growing monitoring. Those present recognized the importance of this "observatory" of security in religious spaces and the importance of mutual knowledge so that the bonds of friendship and trust can help prevent, still little noticeable but always growing, violence against different religious communities.

After the summer vacation period, the next meeting will be scheduled.