

“Rebuilding Lives, Rebuilding Communities: Ensuring a Future for Persecuted Christians”

74TH U.N. GENERAL ASSEMBLY, HIGH-LEVEL PANEL DISCUSSION

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H.E Mr. Péter Szijjártó, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary (co-host)

TRANSCRIPT

[BEGIN FILE]

Péter Szijjártó:

Good morning to all of you. Well, everything is relative so, being early, when I was enrolled in the Benedictine high school, we had the morning Mass at 5:45, so, actually at that – at eight o'clock, we didn't even remember what happened in the morning and [LAUGHTER] when we got up, you know. So, thank you, all of my colleagues and friends here around the table to join us and thank you to all to show with your presence that this is an important topic. Look, Hungary has been a proud Christian country for the last one thousand and nineteen years. That was the time that our first king, Saint Stephen, had offered the country to Mary the Virgin. And based on that, our constitution starts with the word God, which is definitely not the mainstream current legal [UNCLEAR] And in the introduction, we say, in the constitution that we are proud of the role Christianity has been playing in establishing and maintaining our statehood-ness. Look, in Hungary, based on the will of the people, we have a political stability and based on that we have the luxury to say what we think. And we are a country which takes seriously its Christian heritage and when we speak about our government being Christian Democratic, it's not just purely political statement. It is really a selection of values. And we, as a truly Christian country, we feel responsibility for the Christian communities being persecuted all around the world, to be helped and assisted by us. And we have to say very openly and I hope that my colleagues, the foreign ministers and secretaries around the table will not go against that position. That in global politics, the fact that the Christians are persecuted is kind of being ignored. There's a big bunch of hypocrisy and political correctness in the air. If you look at the resolutions and documents of international organizations, you will hardly find any reference to persecuted Christians in the communities. When we have debates on the foreign affairs council of the European Union, the maximum I can reach is the reference to religious minorities, but I never get through with the Christians. And this is in Europe. And I think we have to say, the fact – we have to speak about the facts clearly. And this is a fact that Christianity is the most persecuted religion all over the world. Four of every five persons who have been killed for their belief are Christians. And, you know, I have many friends among those foreign ministers who are of Muslim faith. And I always – I always respect the enthusiasm through what they speak about – they speak up in favour of the persecuted Muslim communities all over the world. And then I always raise the question in myself, so, how it comes that we Christians are shy to do so? And once I have heard a very, very false explanation in this regard, which said that, well, we don't have to speak up for our Christian communities because we are the biggest religion in Earth. But religion is not a global issue. Religion is always a local issue. And if locally, we, I mean, Christians, are in minority, then we have to speak up against persecution. So, I think our homework is to help international politics to leave both hypocrisy and political correctness behind. We in Hungary, we have settled – we have established a state secretariat, which has only one duty, to monitor the situation of the Christian communities all over the world and if we see that somewhere we need to help, then we act. We have launched the program called Hungary Hubs in the framework of which we give the financial assistance directly to the Christian communities in the Middle East. So far, in the last three years, we have spent forty million dollars on that. When the

bishops from the Middle East come to Budapest, they usually ask us, please do not encourage our members to go to Europe because then you will contribute to the fulfilment of the goals of the terrorist organizations, namely, eliminating the Christian communities. Please help us to be able to stay there. Please help us to get stronger. So, our policy is based on – based on that. So far, with our support, we have contributed to fifty thousand Christians, to be able to stay or to return in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Nigeria and Ethiopia. We have, just, let me highlight some of this, we have basically rebuilt one thousand torn-down houses of Christian families in Iraq on the Nineveh Plain in a settlement called Daskov [PH] together with the Catholic church. So, one thousand families who had to escape because of ISIS could return to their homes. We support the project of open hospitals in Syria, the three biggest Christian hospitals, we cover their medical expenses. Together with our Polish friends, we are reconstructing an orphanage in Omsk. We just concluded a huge significant program in Lebanon. We have reconstructed thirty-three Christian churches there and currently we are building four schools in the Middle East for the Christians. And we understand that in many cases the Christians are discriminated from higher education as well, so, we have started a scholarship program for Christian young people in the framework of which currently two hundred and fifty Christian young people study at Hungarian universities. After they study, they go back to their communities and will strengthen them. I would like to highlight that this year, we're going to organize, in November, we're going to organize the second international conference on persecuting Christians where we tried to encourage a joint action against escalating religious-based persecution. Leaders of the eastern and western Christian communities will join us in Budapest and hopefully we will go closer to a situation when the Christians should not be afraid anywhere in the world. So, as a country of Saint Stephen, we speak to our Christian heritage and we don't let the persecuted Christian communities down and let me tell you that we are extremely happy and delighted that more and more countries subscribe to this. We are very happy that the current US Administration speaks about this issue openly because we need to have a flagship in order to have a – in order to have a successful project. We are very happy with the latest outcome of the Brazilian election of a president – presidential election, because then Brazil represents a total different approach. We definitely cross fingers for the current British government to survive [LAUGHTER] and, actually, and, you know, when it comes to the Philippines, we always, we always respect the work they've been doing in favour of the Christian communities and we definitely are happy and honored that the Holy See is always giving a framework for that. And, you know, when it comes to [UNCLEAR], then we are ready to continue the fight together with our Polish friends with whom we are usually on the top of the European agenda regarding democracy and rule of law, but we always, but we always prove that we are okay and we do everything on the basis of the will of our people. Thank you so much for your kind attention and thanks for coming. [APPLAUSE]

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