

UPF Lisbon, Portugal Joins Discussion of on Safety in Places of Worship

Sergio Vieira
July 12, 2023



Lisbon, Portugal -- UPF-Portugal was represented at a meeting at Lusophone University on "Safety in Places of Worship."

The meeting on July 12, 2023, also was attended 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 Professor **Paulo Oliveira** of Lusophone University, the floor was given to Professor **Dr. Paulo M. Pinto**, dean at Lusophone University in São Paulo, Brazil; coordinator of the Science of Religions department at Lusophone University in Lisbon; executive director general of the Academic Council at the Lusophone University Group; an ambassador to the World Parliament of Religions; and the founder of the European Academy of Religions.

Dr. Pinto gave a presentation on PROSECUW (Protection and Security for Places of Worship), a project funded by the Internal Security Fund Police of the European Commission.

PROSECUW has been adopted by various European countries, given the increasing levels of violence faced by the many new religious communities coming from non-European Union countries.

During the meeting Dr. Pinto presented the results of a survey of religious leaders about safety in Portuguese places of worship:

- Religious freedom is increasingly presented as a relevant topic and raises the question of the significant difference that exists between real religious freedom and the perception that its practitioners

and the general population have.

- A study carried out in different evangelical churches highlights a "religious freedom" that is legislated but not practiced.
- In Portugal, the perception that there is no religious persecution does not correspond to reality. This perception is due to the absence of sufficient religious diversity capable of leading to confrontation.
- Social peace in Portugal, as it is so evident, deserves an attentive and careful analysis. In fact, 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, an overwhelming majority of religious leaders feel very secure.
- Good security was recognized in public spaces, with increased emphasis on worship spaces.
- Religious security was not recognized by religious leaders as an issue needing further investment.

After the presentation of the survey results, the debate was opened. Of the various comments, 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 attitude of the population when the perception is that of a "threat."

The number of immigrants and the respective mode of immigration are fundamental factors that require careful and increasing 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 to prevent violence against various religious communities.