Nicosia, January 16, 2023

**Subject: Submission to the Report on Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) and freedom form violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity**

Regarding the above matter, please see below the response of the Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights (Ombudsman) which provides related information in a general manner, based on her interventions related to the issue.

Based on the Commissioner’s mandates, the latter has stressed, on various occasions the need to protect and empower the LGBT+ persons to exercise and enjoy all of their human rights on an equal basis with other members of the society.

With respect to the protection of LGBT+ individuals’ access to faith and spirituality in relation to freedom from violence and discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity, the Commissioner has made a relevant intervention, concerning homophobic comments made by a Bishop of the Church of Cyprus, in a public speech.

In her intervention, the Commissioner condemned the content of the rhetoric used by the said Bishop of the Church and underlined that “opinions and ideas” that can stigmatize persons and create hostility towards persons of the LGBT+ community, may promote hatred and discrimination that can lead even to hate crime.

Such hostile and non-inclusive narratives that are made “in the name of religion”, can negatively affect the right to freedom of religion or belief of the person of the LGBT+ community, that are bound to feel excluded unwelcome to practice specific religions.