

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

WORKING SESSION 11

Tolerance and non-discrimination I, including prevention and responses to hate crimes in the OSCE area and combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also focusing on intolerance on religious grounds

As delivered by

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Ms. Moderator,

Many thanks to distinguished introducers for interesting presentations.

At the outset, we would like to share some information on our national experience. Armenia stands at the forefront of international efforts in prevention and remembrance of genocides. Since last HDIM on December 9th, the international community observed the first ever International Day of Commemoration and Dignity of the Victims of the Crime of Genocide and of the Prevention of this Crime, which was established by decision of the UN General Assembly, initiated by Armenia. In April this year my country organized and hosted the Second Global forum on the Crime of Genocide and Aurora prize award ceremony, which were held in Yerevan and got wide international attention and participation in the framework of the Armenian Genocide commemoration. On behalf of the Armenian Genocide survivors a group of well-known intellectuals and philanthropists launched the Hundred Lives Initiative and Aurora Prize for Awakening Humanity as a gratitude to those who saved the sons and daughters of perishing nation regardless of difficult circumstances. First nominees of the award were well-known individuals and organizations from all over the world, who spare no efforts to assist victims of crimes against humanity.

Mr. Moderator,

In the second part of my remarks I will focus on the alarming situation in our region and concrete cases of hate crimes. We are facing a situation, when racist and xenophobic discourse and open encouragement of hate crimes is a state policy, publicly pursued by the highest political leadership of Azerbaijan.

Armenia consistently voiced its concerns on the pardon and glorification by President Aliyev of a murderer Ramil Safarov, Azerbaijani officer, who was convicted for decapitating asleep Armenian officer Gurgen Margaryan in Hungary. The glorification of both hate crime and its perpetrator at such a high political level received strong international condemnation and criticism, including by UN, European Parliament, Council of Europe, number of OSCE participating States. The OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs particularly highlighted “the damage the pardon and any attempts to glorify the crime have done to the peace process and trust between the sides”. The OSCE Secretary General issued an early warning message in this regard. My Delegation pursued this matter in the OSCE with the aim to prevent recurrence of such heinous crimes.

Such a policy of promoting anti-Armenian hatred encouraged new crimes. Azerbaijani soldiers perpetrated ISIL style executions and paraded themselves with chopped heads of the Nagorno-Karabakh servicemen in front of cameras during their April large-scale military offensive in an attempt to earn similar acknowledgment as “national heroes”. The April aggression led to atrocities, which included killings, torture, mutilation of children and elderly persons on the religious and ethnic ground in their homes in Nagorno-Karabakh by Azerbaijani armed forces. Photos of these crimes, placed on the official webpage of Baku State University received many “likes” by young students, which is particularly shocking.

Azerbaijani highest authorities did not shy away to compel religious leaders to support their hate crime policy. On the same days Allahshükür Pashazade, Sheikh ul-Islam and Grand Mufti of the Caucasus, publicly boasted that Azerbaijani army showed that it can resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict through force.

It was with determination to fuel religious strife between Armenian and Azerbaijani people that Azerbaijani highest authorities erased the Christian religious monuments. In its 2015 report the US Commission on International Religious Freedom has made a reference to the vandalized Armenian cemetery in Nakhijevan, where thousands of cross-stones - the masterpieces of medieval Armenian culture were totally destroyed, and reported that the religious freedom in Azerbaijan has further deteriorated, including by bringing examples of Baku's only surviving Armenian church which is currently used as an archive for the Presidential administration and the confiscated Lutheran Church turned into a concert hall.

Consistent with their policy of promotion of hatred, the highest Azerbaijani authorities silenced voices of peace and reconciliation within the Azerbaijani society.

ECRI, the international monitoring body of Council of Europe, consistently highlighted in its country specific report the wide-spread negative official and media discourse in Azerbaijan and called upon Azerbaijani authorities to take appropriate measures in addressing daily discrimination and hate speech against Armenians.

Regrettably ODIHR remained silent on all these cases, which indicates that it is not able to utilize its early warning potential through hate crime reporting, which remains ineffective. The methodology used by ODIHR in gathering and reporting hate crimes is not conducive for identifying those hate crimes which may represent eminent threat to the security in the OSCE area. The challenges of radicalization, extremism and hate crimes remain unaddressed.

Moreover, ODIHR remained consistent in its intention to hold an event on TND in Baku.

Mr. Moderator,

It will be erroneous to expect that one particular human right will be upheld in the framework of massive violation of fundamental freedoms including freedom of expression and freedom of assembly in Azerbaijan.

These examples show that country with very low level of human rights standards can become a threat to regional security since the ruling elite derives its legitimacy not from protection but violation of human rights.

In light of the above, we would like to reiterate our position of rejection of the intention to hold an ODIHR event, something, which will heavily affect credibility and reputation of our Organization and the ODIHR in our region. We understand that this decision came as a result of Azerbaijan's consistent blackmailing and smear campaign targeting OSCE institutions. We would like to stress that such an appeasing move will only serve as an encouragement of future hate crimes.

We believe that the TND programme of ODIHR duplicates the activities of other international organizations, namely UN and Council of Europe, the monitoring and reporting tools of which prove to be more efficient and result-oriented.

We would like to recommend optimization of the ODIHR's TND programme by terminating those tools and events, which lack any added value and focus on security aspects of tolerance and non-discrimination.

Finally, we would like to encourage the delegation of Azerbaijan to check more carefully statements of its GONGO, as the latter even managed to distort the official Azerbaijani statistics on the Armenians in Azerbaijan. Regrettably, the year of multiculturalism in Azerbaijan started by barbaric atrocities against the Armenian people of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Thank You.