

*Working session 15: Fundamental freedoms II (continued), including:
– Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief*

REPORT

Mr. Maksym VASIN, Executive Director of the Institute for Religious Freedom (Ukraine)

Dear Sirs and Madams,

Recently there was published the Report of the Human Rights Assessment Mission on Crimea prepared by the OSCE ODIHR and the High Commissioner on National Minorities. This Report and results of monitoring by human rights defenders refer to numerous cases of systematic oppression the religious freedom of the residents of the Ukrainian Peninsula of Crimea after its occupation by the Russian military troops in February 2014.

Among them are the obligatory re-registration of all religious and non-governmental organizations that entails requirement of obtaining the Russian citizenship; the illegal searches and confiscation of religious literature under the occasion of extremism charges; and the rise of rent fees for the places of worship or the utter refusal for renting them out. Beside this the deportation of the objectionable church clergy from Crimea by refusing to grant them as foreigners with the temporal residence permit, while some of them have been threatened, beaten, arrested and even tortured.

All of mentioned above turn out to be a tool of the fight with dissent. As it is well known, for all of these terrible violations of the fundamental right to freedom of religion or belief the Russian Federation carries out the responsibility today, because its representatives don't get tired to persevere in claiming its jurisdiction in Crimea.

But the more important issue that requires the international community attention is the more brutal hate crimes and religious persecution by the armed pro-Russian separatists in the other part of Ukraine – in Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Donbas). The multitude of evidence and facts testify the religious intolerance, which follows the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

By this time still dozens of churches, places of worship and theological seminaries remain captured by pro-Russian combatants in the eastern Ukraine. Based on facts gathered by human rights defenders it can be stated that in the Donbas region the freedom of religion or belief is completely absent or counteracted by many restrictions and carries significant risks for religious minorities.

And it is happening not in Africa or Asia but not so far from this place – on the Eastern borders of the democratic Europe. That is why we recommend the ODIHR and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission in Ukraine to conduct the monitoring of the religious situation in the eastern Ukraine and make a report based on results. Donetsk and Luhansk regions also require a permanent independent human rights monitoring.

Thank you for your attention!