

**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan
Friday, 15 September 2017**

**Working session 9: Tolerance and non-discrimination,
including: Combating racism, xenophobia, and
discrimination; Combating anti-Semitism and
intolerance and discrimination against Christians,
Muslims and members of other religions; Prevention
and responses to hate crimes in the OSCE area.**

**Delivered by prof. Dr. Etibar Najafov, Chief Adviser,
Department of Interethnic Relations,
Multiculturalism and Religious Affairs of the
Administration of the President of the Republic of
Azerbaijan**

Thank you Mr.moderator,

Azerbaijani is one of a few states in the world in which multiculturalism is a state policy. The state has been playing a leading role in conducting this policy, in observing its principles, in pursuing the policy of tolerance and non-discrimination. With the aim to prevent desintegrative processes in the society the Azerbaijani state does its best the policy of multiculturalism to serve to sovereignty, territorial integrity, democratic development, and national security of the country.

One of the most important features of multiculturalism policy of Azerbaijan is that it promotes development of high level of relations between state and religion in Azerbaijan. The high level of relations between state and religion is seen in the four following advantages:

Firstly, religious freedom is guaranteed by the state

Granting religious freedom to its citizens is one of the priorities of the domestic policy of Azerbaijan. The Azerbaijani state considers religious freedom of its citizens as an integral part of their rights and freedoms. The Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the **Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Freedom of Religious Belief"** and other legal documents contain articles related to religious freedom.

All citizens of Azerbaijan, including national minorities are free in confessing to their religions. According to the 3-rd Paragraph **of the 25-th Article of the Constitution of RA- "Right for equality"**: "The state guarantees equality of rights and liberties of everyone, irrespective of race, ethnic belongness, religion, language, sex, origin, financial position, occupation, political convictions, membership in political parties, trade unions and other public organizations. Rights and liberties of a person, citizen cannot be restricted due to race, nationality, religion, language, sex, origin, conviction, political and social belonging".

Article 48. Freedom of conscience

I. Everyone enjoys the freedom of conscience.

II. Everyone has the right to define his/her attitude to religion, to profess, individually or together with others, any religion or to profess no religion, to express and spread one's beliefs concerning religion.

Secondly, all religions in Azerbaijan are equal before the law

The next indicator of the high level of relations between state and religion in Azerbaijan is that all religions and religious confessions are equal before the law. We mean those religious organisations which got registrations from State Committee for Work with Religious Organisations (SCWRO). Until 2016 749 religious organisations got the registrations. Of them 721- Muslim, 17- Christian, 8- Jewish, 2-Bahai and 1 Krishnaid. Of them 721- Muslim, 17- Christian, 8- Jewish, 2-Bahai and 1 Krishnaid. (According to research carried out by the State Committee on Religious Associations, 96% of them are Muslims, the rest 4% are the followers of other religions. Statistics of registered religious organizations indicate that Muslim organizations to Muslim population ratio are 1:15000 in Azerbaijan, whereas a registered non-Muslim organization/non-Muslim citizen ratio in the Republic is 1:10000. This proves that, the number of non-Islamic religious communities is greater than that of Muslim ones in Azerbaijan.)

Although 96% of the population of Azerbaijan are Muslims. However according to **Article 18-1** of the Constitution: “All religions are equal before the law”.

It is well known that division of Islam into Shiia and Sunni branches has been one of the main causes of socio-economic, political, and cultural backwardness of the Muslim world. The division has caused bloody conflicts among Muslims. The clash between Shiia and Sunni has been seen both within and between states. There was no conflict between Shiias and Sunnis in Azerbaijan. In some mosques of Azerbaijan Shiia and Sunni Muslims pray together.

Thirdly, the state provides all necessary assistance to religious organizations;

One of the most important features of the religious policy of Azerbaijan is that the state escapes differential attitude towards religious communities. It provides equal support, assistance including financial one to representatives of all religious communities.

Since 2003 about 250 mosques were built or renovated by the state. By the initiative and support of the President of Azerbaijan 2 sinagogues were built respectively in 2003 (for Ashkenazi Jews) and in 2012 (for Mountainous Jews) in Baku. In 1999 "Jen Mironosets", Russian Orthodox church in Baku was renovated. In 2008 Roma Catholic church was built in Baku.

Alongside with material and financial assistance the state provides moral support to religious organizations in Azerbaijan. Since 1999 The International Day of Tolerance has been celebrated in Azerbaijan on November 16-th. On occasion of religious holidays and Days of Remembrance the President of Azerbaijan addresses

to representatives of religious communities through media, meets them, attends their memorable events.

Fourthly, interreligious relations in Azerbaijan are based on principles of mutual respect and cooperation

Religious freedom, equality of all religions before the law, state assistance to representatives of all religious groups created a favorable conditions for cooperation between religious organizations in Azerbaijan. Representatives of religious groups attend their religious holidays, memorable days, help each other. F.e., during the erecting the Alexander Nevski church in Baku in the end of the XIX century Muslim population of Baku donated very much.

Thus, the policy of multiculturalism of the Republic of Azerbaijan promotes the development of a high level of relations between the state and religion, which in turn creates favorable conditions for the country's socio-economic development.