

Opening speech delivered by Ambassador Andrew Tesoriere, Head of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek, at the concluding event of the State Commission on Religious Affairs' on "Strengthening stakeholder dialogue and understanding of freedom of religion and belief"

Bishkek, 30 November 2010

Distinguished participants and colleagues,

I am pleased to attend today's high-level event, which concludes a series of three recent similar roundtables in Osh and Bishkek.

As a fundamental individual human right, the freedom of thought, conscience and religion embodies our very human essence. As such, this freedom needs to be nurtured and protected, without harming others' similar rights or collective rights such as national security.

As you are aware, Kyrgyzstan hosted in 2009 in Bishkek the first Central Asian conference on countering radicalization, terrorism and extremism through an approach, called the "Public-Private Partnership". This approach adopts a model employed to good effect in other countries, in which a partnership is molded between the State Authorities, civil society actors including religious organizations and the business community in order to counter terrorism, religious radicalism and extremism.

This "soft security" approach advocates respect for human rights through education. Against this background, the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA) has become a significant pillar of Kyrgyzstan's "Public-Private partnership" alliance. SCRA promotes religious freedom at local grassroots level through the creation of public committees, which bring together all key members of local communities.

OSCE's current close and fruitful cooperation with SCRA has laid the foundation for two key initiatives.

Firstly, the preparation of a draft law on religious education, on which ODIHR has already offered comments, which will be presented for the new Parliament's consideration.

Secondly, the finalisation of a National Strategy on Religious Freedom, based on respect for religious and ethnic diversity, tolerance and good governance.

These initiatives and SCRA's wider work represent an intricate part of the more tolerant society, to which Kyrgyzstan like all OSCE countries aspires.

Thank you for your attention.