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PC.DEL/355/23  
18 March 2023

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1415th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

16 March 2023

**On the International Day to Combat Islamophobia**

Mr. Chairperson,

Yesterday, the world observed the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, established by United Nations General Assembly resolution 76/254 on 15 March 2022. As a multi-confessional and multi-ethnic State that takes a serious approach to protecting the feelings of believers, Russia co-sponsored this important document.

Unfortunately, over the past year, instead of an improvement in the situation in this sphere, the OSCE area has achieved the opposite – a dramatic increase in intolerance towards Muslims. Recently, anti-Islamic sentiments came to a head with the burning of the Holy Koran in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden as a result of the outrageous actions of radicals, carried out in co-ordination with the local authorities. We emphasize once again our principled position that it is inadmissible to justify actions that insult the feelings of believers and incite interreligious enmity. All the more so when reference is made to the supposedly absolute nature of freedom of speech.

Despite the OSCE's accumulated body of commitments to promote tolerance and non-discrimination – there are about ten of them – Islamophobia has become a serious problem in a number of OSCE participating States. To illustrate, let us consider just a few examples.

According to the Annual Report on Islamophobia in Europe in 2022, published by the Belgian anti-Islamophobia non-governmental organization Collective for Countering Islamophobia in Europe, there has been a surge of intolerance towards Muslims in the region. The organization recorded 527 incidents involving discrimination, incitement to hatred, insults, physical attacks and so on. Notably, 501 cases occurred in France.

This data echoes the findings of the September review “European Islamophobia Report 2021”. According to experts, France has become one of the “main spots of anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobic incidents”.

The United Kingdom is also among the worst offenders. According to the most recent statistics from the country's Home Office, released in October 2022, there were 3,459 religiously motivated hate crimes against Muslims during the reporting period. That is a 42 per cent increase from 2021.

Things are no better in Germany. A survey conducted in the autumn of 2022 by the German Expert Council on Integration and Migration showed that up to half of the 15,000 respondents had anti-Islamic or anti-Muslim views. This data echoes the findings of a recent study by the University of Leipzig. It indicates that anti-Islamic sentiments are intensifying in the east of the country: almost half of those surveyed (46.6 per cent) demanded a ban on the entry of Muslim migrants.

Persistent levels of Islamophobia have also been observed in the countries of North America. At the Permanent Council meeting on 26 January, the Permanent Representative of Canada, when discussing the issue of Islamophobic attacks in Europe, spoke about the various measures taken by her Government to promote tolerance towards and non-discrimination against followers of Islam. We believe that their scope, including the establishment of a special representative in this area, is justified, since negative attitudes to Islam are very widespread among Canadians. According to the findings of the Angus Reid Institute, for example, in Quebec, 52 per cent of people living in the province have negative feelings about Muslims.

Mr. Chairperson,

The rise in anti-Islamic sentiment is not happening in a vacuum. It is a problem that needs to be addressed comprehensively. At a recent thematic event in New York, United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres referred to Islamophobia as “part of the resurgence of ethno-nationalism, neo-Nazi white supremacist ideologies, and violence targeting vulnerable populations including Muslims, Jews, some minority Christian communities and others”. In other words, the problems to which Russia has been drawing the attention of the OSCE and its participating States for years. This confirms the need for vigorous efforts to combat these phenomena as well as racism and discrimination, including on religious grounds. Of particular relevance in this context is the fulfilment of the tasks set by the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014 to develop declarations on combating Christianophobia and Islamophobia.

Once again we call upon the OSCE Chairmanship of North Macedonia and the Irish Chairmanship of the Human Dimension Committee to prioritize this crucial task. We say this also because we do not see the Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims among the participants in the discussion.

Thank you for your attention.