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**STATEMENT BY MS. AIMAN RUSTEMBEKOVA,
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FOUNDATION ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS**

International Law on Freedom of Conscience and Rights of the Child

Distinguished Conference participants,

It is widely recognized that one of Kazakhstan's significant achievements in the human dimension is ensuring harmony among religions.

The efforts of many countries to achieve peace among different religions run up against difficult issues in international law. This applies in particular to young people and children, who are the future of every country.

We are frequently contacted by individuals with regard to situations in which parents adhere to different faiths and cannot agree on which church their children should attend.

In these cases, we are seeing a violation not only of the rights of the child to all-around development, but also those of other family members who believe that the children should not attend a given house of worship. Serious conflicts arise within the family, which can even lead to divorce.

In order to ease this sort of conflict, our proposal to the global community is to adopt a uniform standard that defines the age at which children should be able to make their own independent decisions about their religious convictions.

Because international law does not contain any clearly defined recommendations about the wearing of religious clothing, the adoption of such a standard would also resolve controversial issues related to the wearing of religious clothing by children in secular schools.

Missionary activity by religious organizations, or proselytizing, is an important problem that needs to be examined. The distribution of literature by certain religious organizations in public places to all individuals, regardless of their age, as well as the visiting of people's homes with the aim of distributing literature, is a violation of human rights. There are also cases in which promotional leaflets containing an invitation to purchase religious literature in some bookstore or another are distributed to absolutely everyone. This is a violation of the individuals' rights, as well as those of religious organizations that are not engaged in the distribution of their literature in public places. This contributes to tension among different faiths. For this reason, the issue needs to be addressed without delay.

Practical experience in resolving this problem has already been gained in certain places around the world. Religious organizations in Germany are permitted to place distribution boxes on the streets, and people can take the books themselves if they are interested. In Belarus and Azerbaijan it is not permitted to distribute literature in public places.

We propose that a uniform standard on this matter be established in international law, providing that the distribution of religious literature is permitted only in places where religious services are held.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Unfortunately, the activities of certain religious organizations violate the rights of children to medical care. For example, parents who are members of certain religious groups do not allow their children to receive blood transfusions and vaccinations, and the children themselves cannot make a decision independently.

Underage children should have the right to good health regardless of the religious views of their parents. This controversial issue needs to be resolved in international law.

People also come to our organization with complaints about those pseudo-religious organizations in which sick people are treated with dubious mystical methods rather than receiving regular medical care.

Since public health is one of the factors contributing to national security, in this case we are witnessing a highly complex situation in which religious organizations come into conflict with government institutions.

Distinguished Conference participants,

In conclusion, I would like to refer to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), which states:

“Article 14

“1. States Parties shall respect the right of the child to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. [...]

“3. Freedom to manifest one’s religion or beliefs may be subject only to such limitations as are prescribed by law and are necessary to protect public safety, order, health or morals, or the fundamental rights and freedoms of others.”

Our proposals regarding a uniform approach to certain controversial issues in international law are aimed at achieving compromises and respect among religious organizations and individuals in terms of the exercise of children’s rights to health and educational development.

Thank you for your attention.

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