

Reply by the Republic of Azerbaijan

1 October 2012

Working Session 11

Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief

Thank you madam Moderator,

There were some references to my country in this regard I would like to state the followings,

First of all we would like to emphasize that religious associations or communities which were not able to pass the re-registration after the amendments were made to the Law on Freedom of Religious Belief are still functioning with their previous registration certificate, without any obstacle. At the same time, we would like to deliver statistics which indicates that the amendments to the Law doesn't make any obstacle for religious communities to be registered: from 2001 till September 2009 for 8 years 534 religious communities were registered, but after the above mentioned amendments i.e. from 2009 till 2012 for 3 years 576 religious communities were registered

Regarding the statements made by Jehovah's Witnesses, first of all we would like to point out that the organization's registration is denied because of the fact that they have not submitted all required documents, in accordance with the appropriate Law.

Concerning the confiscation of religious literature and problems importing them we firstly want to underline that in accordance with the abovementioned Law the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations provides expertise of religious literature and the literature that promotes religious hatred, un-human ideas and etc. is not permitted to be imported to the country.

Another point we would like to stress is that Jehovah's Witnesses has imported to my country books in tens of different titles and almost all of them has been allowed.

Regarding the alternative military service Azerbaijan recognizes its obligation taken when entering the Council of Europe. We too want very much to be able

to provide alternative military service for our citizens and benefit from its advantages. It would help strengthen social work in Azerbaijan.

But, unfortunately for us it is temporarily impossible due to the fact that one fifth of our territories remain under the occupation of Armenia and the mentioned OSCE participating state shows no intention of withdrawing its troops peacefully from our lands. As soon as Armenia withdraws its troops from Nagorno Karabakh region of Azerbaijan as well as the 7 adjacent to it regions, Azerbaijan will adopt the relevant law and will provide alternative military service for its citizens.

Thank you!