

**Statement of the Delegation of Ukraine
at the Working Session 7 “Tolerance and non-discrimination I, 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” of
2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

**Mr. Moderator,
Distinguished participants,**

The delegation of Ukraine is aligning itself with the statement of the European Union. Also I would like to add some points in my nation capacity.

The OSCE commitments on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief were first enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and further elaborated in many subsequent OSCE documents, including the 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration, in which participating States recognized that “greater efforts must be made to promote freedom of religion or belief and to combat intolerance and discrimination”. They constitute a comprehensive framework for participating States to ensure the respect for and promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Ukraine is fully committed to protecting and fostering the fundamental freedom of religion or belief, guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine, in compliance with the OSCE commitments and applicable international standards.

Ukraine is a multinational country, with over 130 nationalities of different religious backgrounds. The Government of Ukraine attaches great importance to the promotion of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding within the Ukrainian society. The overwhelming majority of religious communities in Ukraine describe harmonious inter-faith relations and conditions of non-discrimination allowing everyone to profess and practice, alone or in community with others, the religion or belief of his or her choice, as well as the right not to profess any religion.

The Government of Ukraine pays special attention to the cooperation with all the religious organizations of Ukraine and inter-confessional dialogue.

The representatives of the Ukrainian churches and religious organizations are participating in the activities of the Commission on religious organizations’ rights implementation under the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, civil councils of the Ministry of Education and Science Ukraine, Ministry of Defense of Ukraine, Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, Ministry of Health Care of Ukraine and Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine.

All-Ukrainian Council of Churches and Religious Organizations, established in 1996, representing more than 90% of my country’s religious denominations, has become the basic platform for inter-confessional dialogue. The President of Ukraine convenes meetings with the Council’s Board members on the regular basis.

To assist in resolution of the problematic issues between the confessions, the Working group of current inter-church conflicts was established in 2014 under the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine. There is also Experts council on freedom of conscience and religious organizations’ activities under the same ministry.

Discussing a very important subject of non-discrimination, we would like to draw your attention again to obvious and impressive fact of discrimination and violation of the freedom of religion in the entire OSCE region that happened for the first time in such scale for last several decades. I mean a fact of complete prohibition of the “Organization of Jehovah Witnesses” in Russian Federation that caused already a great concern of many delegations present here. The fact of ban of the religious institution with the total number of followers in around 170 thousand can't have any explanations and justification.

Besides prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses, according to the so-called anti-extremist legislation and additions to the Russian law on religion from so-called “Yarovaja package”, adopted in 2016, other religious communities are continuing to feel for themselves different kinds of repressions.

Several alternative Orthodox jurisdictions, many Protestant groups, the great variety of Muslim organizations, and surely the new religious movements are under the state repressions and experience different forms of limitations of their activity.

So, the conscious accent that was expressed today by the Russian Federation concerning the necessity to guarantee the non-discriminative approach and rights of religious majorities, it's just an obvious way to disguise, to mask the real intention - to continue and to justify state politics of repressions against whose religious organizations that are out of the state control for far and actively trying to implement the principles of religious freedom in the Russian society as a basis for preparation the basis for spreading this experience to the political sphere as well.

Distinguished participants,

I also would like to present a few facts concerning the statement of the representative of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under jurisdiction of the Moscow Patriarchate.

It's correct that till now this Church is still the biggest religious organization according to the number of registered religious communities. But at the same time according to personal self-identification it has in two times less adherents than the Kyivan Patriarchate.

This fact explains why a great majority of former believers of the Moscow Patriarchate now are trying to change their personal affiliation and affiliation of hundreds of their communities. It's a free choice of people that is realizing without any pressure.

Accusation of the Ministry of Culture of Ukraine in undesirability to register the regulative documents of the Church doesn't correlate with reality.

During last two years two monasteries and three synodic departments (totally five units) of this church have been registered because in these cases the documents met requirements of the national law on religion. In eleven other cases the registration process had no chances to be completed because the documents have been consciously based on the principles that oppose to the main concept of the Ukrainian legislation which presuppose that any religious community has an own juridical status.

The offered documents implement alternative concept when the church administrative center has right of complete control over the community life including a right to dispose of real estate.

Distinguished participants,

We remain deeply alarmed over the repressions in the Crimea by the occupying authorities, which take the form of attacks on and the expulsion of the priests of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, as well as raids against Crimean Tatars' mosques and madrasas. Priests and mullas are forced to cooperate with the Russian Federal Security Service and to provide information about their parishioners. Those who refuse are threatened with prosecution on false charges of extremism. The mass-media controlled by the occupying authorities regularly spread the propaganda accusing followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate of fascism and hatred. Many Ukrainian priests were forced to leave Crimea.

There have been increasing reports of violations of freedom of religion or belief in certain areas of Donbas, temporarily controlled by the Russia-backed militants. All faith traditions appear to be targeted by the militants through the persecution, abductions, unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture and ill-treatment and even killings of clergy members and believers, as well as the seizure of church property. The most endangered are the believers and priests of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Jehovah Witnesses, and Ukrainian Christian Evangelic Church.

We strongly condemn these manifestations of religious-biased violence and discrimination, that should become a matter of serious concern for the international organizations and human rights NGOs, and we urge the Russian Federation to abide by the norms of international law and OSCE principles and commitments.

In this context we underline the need to pay special attention to the cases of discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, including against Christians, Jews, Muslims and members of other religions in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, city of Sevastopol and certain areas of Donetsk and Luhansk regions (Ukraine), which requires:

- to put an end to all forms of intimidation and harassment of religious communities;
- to properly investigate all incidents, thus enabling the protection of the freedom of religion or belief;
- to fully respect and protect freedom of religion or belief, including the right of religious communities to freely function without undue administrative or legislative hindrance, harassment or other restrictions.

Distinguished colleagues,

All those violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms constitute a serious threat to national security and peace in Ukraine and Europe and demand an adequate international response. We encourage the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine and the OSCE Institutions to be more persistent in their efforts to ensure close monitoring of and reporting on the human rights situation in the

occupied Crimea and certain areas of Donbas, namely the cases of religious intolerance, to help restore the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the affected regions and situations of occupation.

I thank you, Mr.Moderator.