

**Statement of the Delegation of Ukraine
at the Working Session 6 “Fundamental freedoms II, including: Freedom of
thought, conscience, religion, or belief” of
2017 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**

Mr. Moderator,

Distinguished participants,

Ukraine aligns itself with the statement of the European Union and I would like to add some lines in my national capacity.

Ukraine is a state with one of the most numerous number of religious organizations, that act in a country, continues its politics oriented on support and even development of the existing level of religious diversity and plurality.

According to the last statistics of the Department for Religious Affairs and Nationalities there are 97 independent religious bodies registered in the country. But it's not a full number of the religious units functioning in the country because, according to the all-European practice, the Ukrainian legislation allows any religious bodies to act without the state registration. More than 1000 communities without the state registration are functioning now in the country.

But just three years ago this number had been much higher – around 1800. 750 communities from this number, mostly as a part of the Spiritual Center of Muslims of Ukraine, had been functioning on the territory of Crimean Peninsula. Now after the Russian temporary occupation of Crimea the whole system of the unregistered communities had been prohibit.

We would like to attract your attention to the terrible fact of the Crimean occupation authorities prosecution of religious organizations in Crimea. I mean repressions concerning the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyivan Patriarchate. During several previous years, several church buildings have been taken out from the local dioceses according with the obvious using of the police forces. The last impressive fact happened at the end of August, just several weeks ago, when the occupational executive service and police officers banned to use some part of the building that belong to the Crimean diocese of the Kyivan Patriarchate. The local bishop was injured during this action.

Distinguished participants,

Speaking about so-called “forced seized of church buildings” in Ukraine we would like to stress that experiencing the politics of supporting the existing religious plurality, at the same time the state is trying to secure the equal rights for all communities.

Equal treatment means sometimes losing by some religious organizations those privileges that had experienced in different periods in the past, when, for example, the Orthodox Church with the canonical connection with the Moscow patriarchate, had in fact much higher level of the state support than any other religious groups.

Equality means also that any religious communities, according to existing national law and recommendations of different international organizations, including the special recommendations of OSCE, can freely choose to which jurisdiction to belong. It means that dozens and even hundreds of communities are changing now their canonical subordination according to the will of the majority of community members.

So any accusations in violation of religious rights made by the representative of the Rus. Federation in the context of free change of the religious affiliation by the religious communities in Ukraine look like a conscious speculations and attempts to limit in fact the obvious rights of any person or religious organization for free choose and change of religious affiliation.

Also we want to support a position and the great concern of many delegations about complete prohibition of the Organization of Jehovah Witnesses in Russian Federation. The fact of ban of the religious institution with the total number of followers in around 170 thousand is one of the most obvious and impressive fact of violation of the freedom of religion in the whole area of responsibility of the OSCE in last several decades.

Besides prohibition of Jehovah's Witnesses, according to so called anti-extremist legislation and additions to the State law of religious freedom from so called the Yarovaja package, other religious communities are continuing to feel for themselves different kinds of repressions, including several alternative Orthodox jurisdictions, many Protestant groups, the great variety of Muslim organizations, and surely the new religious movements.

So conscious tress that Russian Federation always does on the necessity to guarantee the right of religious majorities it's an obvious way to disguise, to mask the real intention - the state politics of repressions against whose religious organizations that are out of the state control.

I thank you, Mr.Moderator.