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Address at the working session 1 - "Tolerance and non-discrimination I"

Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the conference!

The emergence of new minority groups or a rapid quantitative growth of the existing ones constitutes a well-known challenge to the integration policies. Social institutions and social consciousness are unable to keep pace with change.

Russia has vast experience, both positive and negative, in integrating ethnic minorities. Basically, this experience has been and remains successful in relation to those ethnic groups that reside compactly on a specific territory. However, there are still huge problems with the integration of the Roma (our colleagues will address this particular issue in greater detail in a corresponding session), and there is a reason to believe that some of the peoples of the North Caucasus are actually becoming less integrated in comparison with earlier periods.

In recent years, the integration of migrant workers has become one of the most pressing political issues in many countries. In the case of Russia, we are talking about millions of people, for whom we lack even an approximate count, coming mostly from Central Asia, but also from the countries of the South Caucasus and the Far East. Of course, the movement of such large numbers of people is bound to create problems, which will be discussed in another session of this conference. These problems are compounded and further complicated by the situation of high-level corruption, which causes a de-facto failure of the work permit system, residential registration, monitoring, passport control, tax collection, and other such systems. Citizens and even public officials frequently make no distinction among the various problems migrant workers could have with their papers. In this situation, large ethnic minorities came to be viewed as consisting almost entirely of the so-called "illegal migrants," and this reputation leads to their systematic ethnic discrimination.

Unfortunately, in the past few months, we can see that the authorities in several regions of Russia supported by politicians from both the ruling party and the opposition initiated populist deportation campaigns against these so-called "illegal migrants," which directly or indirectly affect the rights of millions of people. In addition, this activity heats up already widespread ethno-xenophobic sentiments in society. Extreme nationalist groups are enthusiastically involved in the campaigns, and the authorities very seldom restrain them, and, occasionally, even attempt to cooperate with them, thus publicly legitimizing such groups. I would like to emphasize that this populist campaign has been initiated by the government. Such campaigns have been observed before, and not just in my country.

Meanwhile, nothing is being done to counteract ethnic discrimination. The Russian Federation has repeatedly rejected the recommendation to create a comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation arguing that its various laws already contain provisions prohibiting discrimination. This is true. Unfortunately, however, these laws lack effective mechanisms for enforcing such a ban. Therefore, there is almost no practice of using judicial mechanisms to combat ethnic discrimination in Russia.

Recommendations to the countries - members of the OSCE :

1. There is a need to adopt and develop comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation or a series of individual acts containing effective rules and procedures of proving discrimination.

2 . When enforcing the laws relating to violations of the rules of entry and residence in the country, obtaining work permits, etc., officials should avoid making public statements linking these disorders with specific ethnic groups, and avoid holding large campaigns. Such enforcement should be carried out systematically and uniformly.

3 Ethnic minorities of immigrant origin need to be considered on an equal footing with the minorities that are indigenous to the country, particularly in the context of practical integration programs.

4 Freedom of speech presupposes the possibility of public expression of intolerance, and resistance to such intolerance should first t the form of counter-polemics and social stigma. It has to be recognized that widespread condemnation of manifestations of ethnic intolerance is the only truly effective method, as opposed to prosecution, which is also sometimes necessary, but is bound to remain extremely selective in this respect.

5 Public officials should have no right to express publicly their intolerance or even disrespect to any minorities. Civil service legislation should include effective sanctions against such actions. These penalties also need be made public.