

**Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria**  
**(Grand Mufti's Office in the Republic of Bulgaria)**

Address: 27, Bratia Miladinovi str., 1301 Sofia/Bulgaria; tel: +359 2 9816001; fax: +359 2 9803058;

web: [www.grandmufti.bg](http://www.grandmufti.bg)

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**2015 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**  
**(Warsaw, 21 September – 2 October 2015)**

**Written statement to**

***Working session 13: Combating hate crimes and ensuring effective protection against  
discrimination***

Excellencies...

Distinguished guests,

Muslim community in Bulgaria increasingly concerned about the hate motivated incidents perpetrated against Muslims and holy sites, while acts of vandalism against mosques and sites for worship have become too frequent.

Intolerant discourse and hate crimes increase and the feeling of insecurity among the targeted groups inflames tensions in the society. These ideas of intolerance disseminated and supported by aggressive nationalists, organisations and political formations which make statements to the detriment of Muslims' religious rights.

The most alarming is that the highest tribune in the Republic of Bulgaria has been used for hate speech. Case in point is the speech of the co-chair of Parliamentary coalition "Patriotic Front" Mr. Valeri Simeonov, who used insulting slang words for Muslims and their religion on 25 March 2015. This anti-Muslim and Islamophobic display from the tribune of the Bulgarian National Assembly deeply offended and affected the Muslims in Bulgaria.

We often witness suchlike statements by various representatives of political parties and movements in Bulgaria, which disturb individual classes and groups of citizens, yet threats and hostile attitude are often directed to Turkish-Muslim community in the country as a whole.

Under the influence of such extreme ideas mosques, sacred places and Muslim schools in different places are offended.

During the year of 2015 the Administration of Muslim Religious Affairs (Grand mufti's Office) recorded 7 hate crime incidents towards Turkish Muslim Minority's holy places or associations.

### **Arson attack on the mosque in Plovdiv**

On January 5, 2015 at 10:30 p.m. an unknown person have come to "Hudavendigar mosque", monument of culture under the protection of UNESCO, poured an inflammable liquid on the woodwork of the facade and set it on fire. The action of the perpetrator can be clearly seen in the camera records. There are many property damages.

### **The mosque in Dobrich**

On January 12, 2015 the mosque "Hadji Osman" in the town of Dobrich has been desecrated, as unknown perpetrators painted a white cross of large size (2 m./1.5 m.) on the gate of the shrine. The worshipers noticed it when they have come for the midday prayer.

### **The mosque in Blagoevgrad**

On March 3, 2015 (The National Day in Bulgaria) the mosque in Blagoevgrad was desecrated by unknown perpetrators. Offensive words were written on the walls, pork offal and organ meats had been thrown in front of the mosque.

### **Regional Mufti's Office of Blagoevgrad**

On February 22, 2015 offensive and threatenning words were written on the walls like "Death to Turks", swastikas and hate symbols were drawn. The incident coincides with the 102<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of forced assimilation and changing the names and religion of the Muslims in Pirin region.

### **The mosque in Gotse Delchev**

On June 18, 2015 "Karadja mosque" in Gotse Delchev was desecrated once again. A pig's head was hanged up at the minaret on the first day of the Holy Ramadan.

### **The mosque in Gorna Oryahovitsa**

On 13 July, 2015 the mosque in Gorna Oryahovitsa town was desecrated with offensive Islamophobic expressions and racist symbols – swastikas and figures. The incident coincides with the Holy Night of Kadr.

### **The mosque in Montana**

The mosque in Montana town was desecrated. Offensive words and racist symbols were drawn on the walls like „White Power”, protobulgarian symbols etc.

## **The mosque in Sofia**

On September 9, 2015 the only mosque in Sofia was attacked and its windows were broken by unknown perpetrator.

### **Recommendations to National authorities:**

Having regard to the above, Bulgaria is expected to combat with racist and religious intolerance with all its manifestations. Hence, it should streamline its legislation so that attempts and actions of this nature will not be treated as “hooligan activities”, but will be considered as acts “threatening ethnic and religious peace” in the country and be punished strictly and uncompromisingly, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation of the perpetrator and to whom they are directed.

### **Recommendations to ODIHR/OSCE:**

1. To suggest specific measures to prevent intolerance, xenophobia and hate crimes;
2. To undertake measures for better supporting OSCE participating States in implementing their commitments on tolerance and non-discrimination;
3. To continue with the training programs on responding to hate crimes and all kind of intolerance for law enforcement, educators, NGOs etc.