

Session 7

archbishop Yevstraty Zoria, Representative of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church Kyiv Patriarchate

Ladies and gentlemen!

Taking into account the topic of the session and some previous speeches, I would like to draw your special attention to systematic discrimination on religious grounds, which unfortunately became the policy of the current Russian government, not only in Russia itself, but also in the territories under its control.

Over the past decades, Russia has gradually renewed the vicious practice of state control over religion, typical of the totalitarian Soviet Union. The state actually established a list of religious organizations with a special position - the so-called "traditional religions": Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism. In fact, these are not religions, but specific religious organizations. Thus, for example, only the Russian Orthodox Church is politically recognized as a "traditional" Christian church, but not other Orthodox jurisdictions, Catholics and Protestants.

From year to year the situation in Russia is only getting worse. The adoption and enactment of laws from the so-called "Yarovaya package" is particularly striking proof of this. Laws, formally aimed at combating extremism, have actually led to a sharp restriction of the freedom of conscience. Now, without special registration and permission in Russia, you can not make collective prayers, you can not teach religion, you can not conduct missionary work. And if "traditional" organizations do not experience problems with Russian authorities, the so-called "non-traditional" organizations suffer from the restrictions imposed by law.

A second example is the ban on the activities of "Jehovah's Witnesses". As an Orthodox, I categorically disagree with the teaching of this organization and the practice of its activities. But I am sure that the "Jehovah's Witnesses" were targeted for state persecution not because of their doctrine or activity, but primarily as a precedent that can be used to intimidate and subordinate any religious organization to the will of the state.

The representative of Russia at the previous session said that "Jehovah's Witnesses" were provided with the right to appeal the decision of the state in a judicial procedure. This statement is very cynical, because everyone knows that in Russia there is, in principle, no independent court. Cynical is the reference to the possibility of applying to the European Court of Human Rights. After all, the representative of Russia is aware of the policy of his country, according to which the decisions of the European Court, that are unpleasant for the state, can not be executed.

Taking into account mentioned Russian legislation and practices in the religious sphere, the statements of Russia and the affiliated with it Church of the Moscow Patriarchate against Ukraine, with criticism of the draft laws, being considered in the Verkhovna Rada, are very cynical. After all, these are only draft and all the participants in the legislative process can improve them. And moreover, these drafts are aimed at ensuring the right to freedom of conscience, and not to limit it, as in Russia.

Is this violation of human rights to establish by law the procedure through which the parish community can choose freely the center of its subordination? Or the establishment of the need for a religious organization to indicate correctly in the documents the name of its leading religious center? Is a real discrimination, when the Moscow Patriarchate will be required by law to be called the Moscow Patriarchate? Is it embarrassing or dangerous to be called so?

As a representative of the Ukrainian Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, which is systematically discriminated by Russia, I ask the OSCE and Member States to pay special attention to these problems.

Thank you.