

Formal statement of the Netherlands on Freedom of religion and belief

Session 3: combating intolerance against Christians and members of other religions

Statement by the Ambassador at Large for Human Rights, Piet de Klerk

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- Freedom of religion and belief has always been an area of particular interest for the Netherlands and an area of particular importance for the OSCE. No international organisation has produced so many detailed provisions concerning the scope of this freedom as the OSCE.
- In the early 1990s, after the collapse of Communism, there seemed to be consensus both with regard to the scope of this freedom and with regard to the need to implement it fully and in a non-discriminatory manner.
- These days, however, participating States are facing serious challenges and dilemmas with respect to the implementation and exercise of freedom of religion and belief.
- The Netherlands is worried about a tendency in Central Asian republics, but also in countries closer by, to increase the grip of the authorities on religious groups through legal means.
- Registration of religious groups is not a policy which the Netherlands would favour. In case there is a registration requirement it may never be a precondition for manifestations of one's religion; a State should not impose sanctions or limitations on religious groups that elect not to register. With or without registration religious groups should always have the right to meet for worship.
- Registration should never be used by governments as a political tool.
- Indeed the position of small religious groups is of concern to our government. High minimum membership requirements should not be allowed with respect to obtaining legal personality.
- We have noted with particular concern the difficulties encountered by smaller religious groups when establishing their places of worship.
- We urge all participating States to make use of registration practices in such a way that all denominations, including smaller religious groups, are free to practise their religions or beliefs.

