

Conference on Freedom of Belief and Expression in Jalal-Abad

When we remember that in past centuries including the 20th century, various religions experienced intense persecutions, it is still important to address the issue of religious freedoms in our time also because religion is alive. On the other hand we must remember that in the past century, believers of all faiths had to endure severe trials in various contexts. It is also to bear in mind that religion has contributed in the past also to both, peace and violence. Nowadays the most recent terrorist activities appear again in effort for identification with religion, whereas, almost three decades ago, none of the terrorist groups could be classified as religious.

What happened then is there a sacred terror? Or religion is exploited?

The answer lies in promoting freedom of belief and expression, the subject, which gathered all of us here in Jalal-Abad.

One can consider that within the transformation process in Central Asian region, religion may be used for nation-building purposes. This leads to politicization of the religion. Considering the social-political conditions in the region of Central Asia one may assume that radicalization of the religion may thus constitute a response to these social, political and economic problems of the region. Radicalization leads religious activity to go underground. Then comes terrorism.

We believe that fight against terrorism must not be a fight against religion. And the fight against terrorism should go beyond the military measures. In this regard, Democracy and civil society must be safeguarded. One should take into account that authoritative measures, oppressive actions by the Governments in implementing anti-terror measures will inevitably push the religious thinking towards integrism and underground activity. That is why the freedom of belief and religion and the freedom of expression appear of vital importance for maintaining peace and stability while promoting the transparency in religious activity within the democratic system.

Allow me to touch upon briefly on what we did in this respect.

Bishkek International Conference on Enhancing Security and Stability in Central Asia for strengthening Comprehensive Efforts to counter terrorism had addressed this issue two months ago. The Programme of Action adopted by the Conference clearly states the measures to combat and prevent terrorism. I will mention some of these measures I consider of paramount importance:

- to prevent and combat terrorism by increasing co-operation in the fields of human rights and the fundamental freedoms, and by strengthening the rule of law
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- building of democratic institutions , through relevant programs of the UN and OSCE
- to enhance the capacity of the judiciary to deal with the aspects of terrorism and related crime , including the provision of relevant expertise and training to further strengthening the independence and impartiality of the judiciary,
- to address inter-ethnic tensions, to foster dialogue between majorities and minorities,
- to promote active civil society engagement in the fight against terrorism
- to offer young people opportunities to learn and practice Tolerance, to enable them actively participate in civil society and to familiarize them with peaceful conflict resolution methods
- to emphasize the importance of tolerance in all aspects of social relations and significant role of dialogue among different cultures, in order to avoid the marginalization of any segment of the society
- to assist in strengthening the free media, serving the legitimate information needs of society
- to address economic and social problems that are exploited by terrorists , by encouraging sustainable development policies.

As reflected in the declaration of the Bishkek Conference, full respect of Human Rights and the Rule of law in one of the important engagement of the OSCE member states.

Member states clearly rejected also identification of terrorism with any particular religion or culture. Attempts by terrorist and violent extremist to present their case as a struggle between religions and cultures were also firmly rejected.

Allow me to conclude by some references to the historical documents which entered into force more than two centuries ago since I believe that these documents are still the most important and remain vitally necessary of the freedom of belief and expression.

I read only one sentence of the Declaration of the rights of the man and the citizen of 26 August 1789. Almost just after the Revolution in France .

Article 10.

“ No one may be disturbed on account of his opinions, even religious ones, as long as the manifestation of such opinions does not interfere with the established Law and Order.”

Another one I want to read also the first Article of the amendments to the Constitution of the U.S ratified on 15 December 1791.

«Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people to assemble and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.»