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**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE OSCE HIGH-LEVEL
CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION
(INCLUDING HUMAN RIGHTS YOUTH EDUCATION ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION)**

Tirana, 21 and 22 May 2013

**Plenary session 2: Combating intolerance and discrimination against
Christians and members of other religions**

Mr. Chairperson,
Colleagues,

The Russian Federation is a multi-ethnic and multifaith State where no religion is given priority. Our country has unique experience of the tolerant coexistence of different ethnicities and religions, which makes it possible to face up to new threats and challenges, including those related to anti-Christian sentiment.

On the territory of the Russian Federation, religious organizations representing more than 66 faiths are registered and operate. Of these, more than 11,000 are from the Russian Orthodox Church, around 4,000 are Protestant and several hundred are Catholic.

An analysis of the situation regarding religious intolerance in the OSCE area shows that nowadays, issues relating to protecting not only the rights of religious minorities, but also those of the religious majority, are on the agenda. Of particular concern is the fact that intolerance and discrimination against Christians takes place within existing legal systems. In Europe, whose culture is based on Christian values and traditions, Christianity is being pushed out of the public arena. In a time when neo-liberal notions are being aggressively forced upon modern society and ideas of morality and ethics are breaking down, the role of traditional religions, and primarily of Christianity, becomes all the greater. Furthermore, defending Europe's Christian identity is becoming one way of combating anti-Christian sentiment.

This task is applies to all traditional religions and faiths, which are the custodians and bearers of humanity's accumulated values, traditions, culture, and moral and ethical standards.

In order to effectively combat manifestations of anti-Christian sentiment, it is essential that the OSCE develop a framework for defending the rights of the majority, which would define a balance between its interests and those of the minority. This question was posed by the Chairman of the Department of External Church Relations of the Patriarchate of Moscow, Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk, at the OSCE Conference on Preventing and Responding to Hate Incidents and Crimes against Christians held in Rome in September 2011. We believe that the OSCE could make a major contribution to resolving this issue.

Examples of relevant jurisprudence in this regard do exist. Some progress was visible in the decisions of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in the cases of the *Otto-Preminger-Institut v. Austria* and of *Cha'are Shalom Ve Tsedek v. France*. However, these ECHR decisions are insufficient for us to be able to speak of a focused set of approaches to consider the rights of the majority. Such approaches are, however, particularly vital in multicultural Europe, where solely promoting the rights of the minority has already led to the growth of right-wing radicalism.

The time has come to openly discuss violations of the rights of Christians and to respond to this challenge through our combined efforts. It would be worthwhile to hold a special OSCE expert event to develop strategies and share experience of efforts regarding this problem.

Through international organizations, we support initiatives and efforts to create an effective mechanism for consultative co-operation with religious organizations that would make it possible to ensure that faith communities are involved in discussing issues surrounding freedom of belief or even the variety of approaches based on world view and ethics to resolving the problems of modern society. Within the United Nations, Russia has already raised the issue of the interconnection between human rights and traditional values, which serve as a form of moral compass that is instilled in the individual during socialization by all of the world religions. We believe that it would also be valuable to develop such a discussion at the OSCE.

Thank you for your attention.