

Speech

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**Government of the Republic of Serbia**  
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Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

The government of the Republic of Serbia recognizes the importance of the realization and protection of the freedom of religion or belief in all its forms. The Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, article 41, guarantees the freedom of religion, which includes the freedom of belief, confession of faith and performance of religious rites. The Law on Churches and Religious Communities of the Republic of Serbia foresees that freedom of religion includes freedom to have or to have not, preserve or change religion or religious conviction, in other words freedom of belief and freedom to profess belief in God, freedom to, either alone or in community with others, and in public or private, manifest religion or religious conviction in worship, teaching, practice and observance, cherishing and developing religious tradition as well as freedom to develop and advance religious education and culture.

The aforementioned constitutional and legal norms create the legal framework that allows the manifestation of religious views in diverse manners. In the Republic of Serbia there is no limitation to the freedom of religion because of the fear of potential terrorist activities.

In that sense, it must be particularly mentioned that according to the new Law on Identification Documents of the Republic of Serbia, if a person to whom the identification document is being issued, due to his or her national belonging, religion or tradition wears a hat or scarf as integral part of their clothing, photographing is allowed with a hat or a scarf.

In Serbia, all traditional and new Christian churches, the Islamic and Jewish religious community, religious movements, groups and associations are free to operate. According to the last population census, held in 2002, 95% of the citizens of Serbia feel that they belong to one of diverse religious organizations. In the educational system in Serbia, pupils are introduced to the spiritual experiences and history of all European religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islamic faith), in accordance with the free choice of each student. In 2004, the

government of Serbia created the Commission for the Improvement of Religious Studies. Members of the Commission include representatives of all churches and religious communities in Serbia (represented each by a prominent clergyman and professor of theology). The Commission establishes and recommends programmes for each confession separately, through a consensus, which means that each particular programme achieves the approval of every member. The same methodology is used for the approval of proposed textbooks, readers and other educational material.

Religious freedoms in Serbia have been significantly promoted and guaranteed through the Law on Churches and Religious Communities adopted by the National Assembly on April 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006. The Law is based on the most progressive European comprehension of individual religious rights, and protects the rights and regulates the legal position of corporative subjects of religious freedoms. Though the Law, all religious organizations are given the chance to affirm in public their spiritual, educational, cultural, humanitarian and social activities. Given this opportunity, many minority religious communities, groups and movements that acted in the past as civil society organizations requested that they be included into the registry of churches and religious communities, in other words, to enter the legislative framework that was created by the Law. All registered religious organizations are guaranteed equal treatment in the process of cooperation with the State, including regarding tax reductions and other benefits for their activities, such as state donations for cultural, educational and social programmes that are realized through religious organizations. Those organizations that do not wish to register are explicitly guaranteed complete freedom of action, based on the Constitution and on international conventions. The Law on Churches and Religious Communities foresees a simple procedure for the registration of religious communities, that can be founded by 0,0001% of the population of Serbia. All churches and religious communities in Serbia are equal, independently from having the status of traditional religious community, which can be seen in a number of legal solutions (for instance regarding the position of the clergy, participation in religious education and so on). Furthermore, the government of the Republic of Serbia, after the proposal on the appraisal of certain provisions of the Law on Churches and Religious Communities, proposed to religious communities alterations of the Law, but the representatives of precisely the so-called small religious communities did not accept any changes to the current text of the Law.

Thank you for your attention.