

**Statement of the Delegation of Ukraine
at the Working Session 7: “Fundamental freedoms I, including: Freedom of
Thought, Conscience, Religion, or Belief” of
2019 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
delivered by Andrij Yurash, director of Department for Religious Affairs and
Nationalities of the Ministry of culture of Ukraine
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Mr. Moderator, dear colleagues,

Providing and supporting religious freedom is a subject of the constant attention and care of the Ukrainian government.

Internationally recognized index of the religious freedom, offered by the Pew Research Center, which *regularly measures the situation with the implementation of the principles of the religious rights in all countries*, shows, during last five years, index of the state limitations of the religious organizations for Ukraine has decreased from 4.2 level till 3.8.

Just for understanding these figures, we can compare Ukrainian index with the situation in just two other countries. One of them, for example Belgium, has the same level – 3.8. At the same time, Russia, which is trying to accuse Ukraine in different types of violations of the religious rights, has an index which is lower in more than two times than the Ukrainian one – 8.1.

So Ukraine permanently confirms its devotion to the idea of equal and objective treatment of any religious organizations.

One more example: despite Russian occupation of Crimea and presence of the regular Russian troops at some districts of the Donbas area, Ukrainian society remains absolutely tolerant towards any religious communities, including those, that have obvious Russian origin and continue to preserve the direct subordination to spiritual centers, located in Russian Federation.

Sometimes even vice versa, among these communities with historical Russian roots, there are several ones, whose free development is completely impossible or seriously limited because of the state limitation in the entire Russia. For example, part of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, which denied its merging with the Moscow Patriarchate twelve years ago, seriously increased its traditional diocesan sediment in Odesa, which has become its world administrative center in fact.

Several groups of so called Russian Old Rite believers historically are inseparable and integrated parts of the Ukrainian society.

All kinds of privileges, that state offer for any religious organizations, are also the subject of use by the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under canonical subordination of the Moscow Patriarchate. Just for the previous year (2018), according to the official data of the church itself, this Church had increased for 5 new bishops, 23 parishes, 7 monasteries, 89 monks and nuns and 123 other members of clergy. At the same time, the Church has received hundreds of hectares for its needs.

At the same time, we observe dramatic situation on the territories, occupied by the Russian Federation:

- Churches with the obvious Ukrainian or pro-Ukrainian identity are completely prohibited or experiencing essential limitation in its activity;
- Russian court, including the appellate instance, has taken a decision to take away the premises of the community of the main cathedral of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Simferopol;
- Because of different kinds of limitations is under almost complete prohibition the activity of the last parishes of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine in Luhans'k – Saint Trinity cathedral. The prior of the community, Rev. Anatolij Nazarenko, is under several criminal proceedings, based on the religious motives;
- according information of the Crimean human rights group, number of Crimean Tatars, imprisoned because of their religious believes, was 55 persons this May;
- dozens members of the communities of the Jehovah Witnesses are under official prosecution on territories, temporary uncontrolled by Ukraine;
- just at some part of the Donets' oblast, 13 objects, that had belonged to the community of Jehovah Witnesses, were taken away by the military groups – *local separatists and Russian occupation government*;
- according to the information from the Russian organization “Memorial”, 177 members of the Jehovah Witnesses Community are now in prison because of religious motives.

Thank you for your attention.