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**STATEMENT BY MR. RAKHAT ALIYEV,
HEAD OF THE DELEGATION OF KAZAKHSTAN, AT THE
CONFERENCE ON RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION**

Vienna, 4-5 September 2003

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Conference Participants,

The religious situation in our country remains stable. We believe that the absence of serious interreligious conflicts is due to the democratization of the State and the fundamental changes in the status of religion in Kazakh society. Religious associations are invited to be involved in socio-cultural measures aimed at strengthening civil peace and religious harmony in society. Leaders of the major religious centres and associations are members of the Assembly of the Peoples of Kazakhstan, the small assemblies in the regions, the permanent Conference on Democratization and Development of Civil Society and the Councils for Relations with Religious Associations. Each year a day of religious harmony is held in all regions and cities. Last year, the day marked the tenth anniversary of the first World Congress towards Spiritual Concord, the first meeting of which was held in Kazakhstan in 1992.

The first International Conference on Peace and Accord, which took place in Almaty in February 2003, stood out among the significant socio-political and religious events. This event was the realization of our President's initiative to promote a global dialogue between peoples and civilizations. The Conference concluded with the adoption of a joint declaration entitled "Toward Peace and Stability".

The fact that 3,036 religious associations representing more than 40 religious sects and denominations operate in Kazakhstan is evidence that the right to freedom of conscience, which is enshrined in the Constitution, is actually being exercised. There are more than 2,200 mosques, churches, temples and other places of worship available to believers. The number of periodical publications issued by religious associations is growing steadily.

There are eight higher, six specialized secondary and three general institutions for spiritual education in the Republic. Of the eight higher institutions, two are Islamic (the "Nur-Mubarak" Egyptian University of Islamic Culture and the institute of further training for imams), one is Catholic, one is Lutheran and four are Protestant. In addition, virtually all the major mosques and Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant churches provide courses and "Sunday schools" for instruction in the tenets of the Koran or the Bible. All spiritual educational institutions in Kazakhstan are State registered and have the status of a legal personality.

In terms of the number of believers, the religious associations of Muslims and Orthodox Christians continue to occupy the leading position in multi-denominational Kazakhstan.

In recent years, the influence of Islam on the social development of Kazakhstan has increased noticeably, although this religion has not become a dominant factor in public life. The religious boom in Kazakhstan began almost immediately after the country gained its independence. Then came the restoration and construction of mosques and the establishment of Islamic spiritual educational institutions.

Today there are 1,669 *Muslim* religious associations in Kazakhstan and 1,537 functioning mosques. According to the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims, there are around 9 million Muslims in the Republic representing 24 nationalities. At the present time, the Spiritual Directorate is headed by the Supreme Mufti Absattar hadji Derbisali, a well-known Arabist and professor. At the International Conference of the Eurasian Islamic Shura held in Cyprus in 2002, he was elected first deputy chairman of that organization.

For a long time, Orthodox Christianity has traditionally coexisted peacefully with Islam on the territory of Kazakhstan. This is what determines the cultural and historical characteristics of our population.

The *Russian Orthodox Church* has the second largest number of followers in Kazakhstan. They belong mainly to Slav nationalities (except the Poles), mostly Russians, Ukrainians and Belarusians.

While in 1956 there were only 55 parishes in Kazakhstan, this year there are 235 religious associations, including eight monasteries (seven in the Astana-Almaty eparchy and one in the Uralsk eparchy).

In accordance with a decision of the Holy Synod, which is of course the highest authority of the Russian Orthodox Church, this year a Metropolitanate was established in Kazakhstan, including the Astana-Almaty, Uralsk-Guryev and Shymkent-Akmola eparchies.

The Russian Orthodox Church performs considerable charitable work in children's homes, hospitals and old peoples' homes. Much work is being done to build and restore churches. In recent years, the Church of Christ the Saviour was built in Almaty, the Cathedral of the Presentation in the Temple in Karaganda, the Cathedral of the Annunciation in Pavlodar, Serafimo-Iversky Cathedral in Ekibastuz and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in Taldykorgan. Three nunneries have been opened in the Akmola, North Kazakhstan and West Kazakhstan regions and three monasteries have been opened - one in the East Kazakhstan region and two in the Almaty region.

A four-year religious school, a branch of the St. Tikhon Theological Institute and a theological missionary college are operating. Virtually all churches and temples have opened parish schools for the study of the basics of Orthodoxy. The monthly papers "*Svet Pravoslaviya v Kazakhstane*", "*Vedī*" and "*Astanaisky Pravoslavny Vestnik*" are published.

The presence in Kazakhstan of religious associations of Catholic and Protestant (principally Baptists and Lutherans) Christianity, and also of Judaism has its history and traditions.

Catholicism is represented in Kazakhstan by religious associations of the Roman Catholic and Greek Catholic Churches. The Apostolic Administration of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, which also includes Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan, was established in 1991, with its centre at Karaganda.

In August 1999, the Apostolic Administration of Kazakhstan became the diocese of Karaganda. Following the decisions taken by Pope John Paul II, the Apostolic Administration of Astana has now been elevated to the Archdiocese of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

Altogether, there are 38 parishes in Kazakhstan with 78 religious associations and around 100 small Catholic communities and around 200 places of worship. There are Greek Catholic communities in the cities of Astana, Karaganda and Pavlodar. Kazakhstan is one of the centres of missionary activities of Catholic monks. More than 60 priests (mainly foreigners: Italians, Poles, Lithuanians, Latvians, Koreans and others) and 70 nuns are working here.

Karaganda is home to the “Mary Mother of the Church” (Catholic higher spiritual seminary). The Roman Catholic Church publishes its own newspaper “Credo”.

Judaism - the national religion of the Jews and the oldest monotheistic religion - has a particular history of development in Kazakhstan.

It is well known that modern Judaism split into three principal branches: Orthodox, Reform and Conservative. All three branches are currently represented in the Republic, something which is due to the strengthening of international ties with both Israel and the United States of America.

At present synagogues are functioning in 10 cities and independent Jewish religious communities have been formed in virtually all the regions of the Republic. The newspaper “Shalom” (founded by the Jewish Congress of Kazakhstan) is published.

The latest step to strengthen the position of Judaism was the meeting of the Eurasian Congress of Rabbis which took place in October 2002 in Almaty.

Protestantism is represented in Kazakhstan mainly by the Evangelical Baptists, Lutherans and Seventh-Day Adventists.

Baptists appeared in Kazakhstan in the early twentieth century, when German peasants from Ukraine and the Volga region received permission to settle in the vast tracts of western Siberia, northern Kazakhstan and the Altai region. The spiritual centre of the Evangelical Christian Baptists of Kazakhstan is located at Sarani in the Karaganda region and unites more than 250 groups and communities. The number of Baptist believers exceeds 11,000 in Kazakhstan. This year many Baptist communities commemorated the 100th anniversary of their activities in Kazakhstan.

Lutheranism in Kazakhstan is found mainly within the German population. At the present time, there are more than 70 religious communities and small groups in the Republic with their national centre in Astana.

Seventh-Day Adventist communities made their appearance in Kazakhstan in the early twentieth century. Their national centre - the Northern Kazakhstan Conference of the Church of the Seventh-Day Adventist Christians - is located in Astana. Organizationally, it is part of the Southern Union of the Seventh-Day Adventists, the headquarters of which is located in Almaty and besides the aforementioned Conference includes Central Asian and Caucasian religious structures.

Other branches of Protestantism have recently started to spread in the Republic, such as the New Apostles Church, Pentecostalism, Methodism, Mennonitism and Presbyterianism.

Pentecostalism is represented in Kazakhstan by various sects. The best known are the Evangelical Christians in the Apostolic Spirit, the largest communities of which are found in Karaganda and Almaty. At the present time, there are around 40 communities in Kazakhstan, numbering around 3,000 followers.

Presbyterianism began to spread in Kazakhstan largely thanks to the missionary activities of foreigners, mainly Korean American preachers who are supported by foreign religious centres and are particularly active at the present time. More than 20 independent Presbyterian groups are operating in Kazakhstan, among the best known are the Church of Grace, the First Presbyterian Church and the Almaty Regional Presbyterian Church.

The charismatic sects are represented by numerous religious associations: "Agape", "Novaya Zhizn", "Novoe Nebo", "Blagaya Vest", "Zhivaya Loza", etc. The majority of these charismatic communities belong to the non-traditional Protestant sects and were established by western missionaries or with their active help.

Protestantism is extremely heterogeneous in Kazakhstan. There are around 1,000 Protestant associations and communities, representing nearly 20 denominations. New sects appear almost every year.

A characteristic feature of all Protestant associations in Kazakhstan is the close link with co-religionists abroad, including fellow citizens who have emigrated. Greater activity on the part of religious associations is due to charitable work, undertaken by virtually all the Protestant churches, and wide participation in and organization of various international forums, festivals and conferences. Work with young people is given particular importance.

Among the new groups, the Jehovah's Witnesses are especially active; they are currently one of the fastest growing denominations in Kazakhstan.

The religious centre of the Jehovah's Witnesses is located at Esik in the Almaty region. There are 75 religious associations officially registered with the legal authorities and 32 local communities comprise around 20,000 parishioners.

One of the principal reasons behind the growth of non-traditional religions in Kazakhstan is the active work of foreign missionaries and financial support from foreign religious centres. There are currently 275 foreign missionaries from more than 20 countries (Algeria, Afghanistan, Egypt, Germany, Iran, Jordan, Italy, Pakistan, Poland, Saudi Arabia, South Korea, Spain, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, the United States of America and others). The bulk of the missionaries are preachers from the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches.

Radical changes in social development in the wake of political and socio-economic reforms carried out in Kazakhstan in the years following independence have substantially changed religious relations. Today, no one doubts that the charitable work of religious denominations is a genuinely unique opportunity to preserve and strengthen the internal political stability, civil peace and religious harmony in our society. Clear evidence of the priority State policy attaches to this subject is the constant attention paid by the Head of State to the religious situation in the country and to the needs of believers, as well as the establishment under the Government of the Council for Relations with Religious Associations, which has subdivisions in all regions and cities.

In actual political practice, President Nazarbaev always takes the position that a secular democratic State with a multi-ethnic and thus multi-religious structure must not grant privileges to any one religion. But, at the same time, the State should not ignore the historically established faiths and must be interested in maintaining the inter-denominational balance.

In Kazakhstan Islam does not play such a dominating role as it does, say, in the socio-political and cultural life in Muslim countries of the Middle East. However, the revival of the moral tenets of the Koran among our population is shaping the spiritual consciousness of our nation. In this regard, Islam is promoting the consolidation of society.

Liberal legislation, religious toleration and pluralism form the basis of our balanced State policy in the matter of inter-faith relations. Firmly rooted in our Constitution are the secular character of the State, guarantees for the right of citizens to freedom of conscience, the absence of protectionism with regard to any particular religion and a tolerant attitude towards all faiths.

A new step towards the strengthening of inter-faith understanding will undoubtedly be the congress of the leaders of world and traditional national religions to be held in Kazakhstan at the end of September this year. It is quite right that the initiative for this forum came from our President Nazarbaev.

Kazakhstan's experience and our State policy supporting civil peace and trust between the practitioners of different religions again demonstrates to the world community the need for and real possibility of trustful coexistence of the different faiths in Kazakhstan. The forthcoming forum is therefore a truly significant event, marking the start of a global interreligious dialogue in the name of peace and harmony.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.