

Esteemed members of religious communities and organizations,

Excellencies, dear participants,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to today's roundtable devoted to inclusive religious education as a tool to preserve identity and promote mutual understanding. This event is meant to get the pulse of current approaches to religious education in a context of rapid change.

All the participants, representatives of different confessions and organizations, have showed a great deal of enthusiasm to gather here today and discuss how religious education can enhance inter-confessional dialogue and, at the same time, contribute to improving interethnic relations.

The OSCE welcomes this enthusiasm and stands ready to support any effort aimed at the promotion of freedom of religion and belief, one of the pillars of the OSCE work in Kyrgyzstan along with the promotion of human rights.

Freedom of religion is encoded in the very founding document of the OSCE: the Helsinki Final Act, which continues to inspire governments- many of which are represented today-, civil society and citizens across the space from Vancouver to Vladivostok. From 1975 to date the OSCE continues to pursue approaches which take stock of cultural diversity and make it a tool of participatory and democratic citizenry.

The OSCE has made Freedom of religion and belief one of its priorities: in its Decision on Combating Intolerance and Non-Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, the OSCE Ministerial Council called upon the participating States to "address the root causes of intolerance and discrimination by encouraging the development of comprehensive domestic education policies and strategies", and awareness-raising measures that "promote a greater understanding of and respect for different cultures, ethnicities, religions or beliefs. These efforts, if pursued within a comprehensive approach to human rights and conflict prevention, have the potential to build an environment of trust, thus of security.

To address these needs the OSCE has engaged in actions aimed at the prevention of conflicts through increasing understanding and awareness: education is one of them.

In these endeavours, the OSCE has the privilege to work with the State Commission on Religious Affairs (SCRA), whose role and status in the Kyrgyz public life is significantly growing. It is not a coincidence that this year the OSCE joint efforts with the SCRA are focused on the promotion of inter-ethnic peace by raising awareness on freedom of religion and belief. The cooperation with the State Commission is aimed to support inter-confessional dialogue, education, development of domestic law and mainstreaming of international norms and standards on freedom of religion.

Through common dialogue and information, Kyrgyzstan will take stock of its cultural richness and of its values of ethnic and religious tolerance.

Our present is infused not only with history but with each other's history.

It is of paramount importance to dig down the layers of civilization and discover roots of common values on which multicultural societies are built.

Education has the power to bridge differences and inspire dialogue.

The OSCE looks forward to learning about your experiences as well as collecting recommendations to improve these endeavours.

The Centre in Bishkek stands ready to support.

I wish you a fruitful dialogue and I thank you once again for being here today.

Chong rakhmat!