

Written contribution by the Delegation of Ukraine

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Working sessions 12-13: Freedom of religion or belief**

FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF IN UKRAINE

Commitment to basic principles of religious freedom is an important element of a democratic society.

The freedom of religion in Ukraine is guaranteed by law. The laws and policies in Ukraine contribute to the free practice of religion.

Under the Constitution of Ukraine, the State promotes the development of the ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity of all peoples in Ukraine; any restriction or privilege based on religious beliefs is inadmissible. However, the foundation and operation of political parties and voluntary organizations are prohibited if their programme goals or actions are aimed at incitement of inter-ethnic, racial or religious hatred.

In addition, the provisions prohibiting the use of mass media for incitement of ethnic or religious hatred are contained in the national legislation in the sphere of mass media and information. Article 161 of the Criminal Code of Ukraine (violation of the equal rights of citizens based on race or ethnicity or attitude to religion) penalizes the willful incitement of ethnic, racial or religious animosity and hatred, the demeaning of ethnic honour and dignity, offending a person's dignity in connection with his or her religious beliefs.

Separation of church and state stands as a constitutional principle that promotes democracy and protects religious freedoms in Ukraine. The Government of Ukraine promotes the development of mutual understanding among the representatives of different confessions and elaborates effective mechanisms of cooperation with church in the humanitarian sphere.

The state policy in the area of freedom of conscience focuses on the promotion of inter-ethnic and interreligious harmony and the prevention of the spread of extremist or radical ideological and religious tendencies.

The implementation of the systemic measures and progressive strategy for cooperation between state and church will contribute to the promotion of tolerance and

mutual respect, to the consolidation of universally recognized moral and ethical principles in the public consciousness and actively counteract, at all levels, any manifestations of racial or religious hatred.