

27 September 2016

**Statement by the Delegation of Azerbaijan
Human Dimension Implementation
Meeting**

Working session 12: Fundamental freedoms I
(continued), including freedom of thought,
conscience, religion or belief
Warsaw, 27 September 2016
as delivered by Rafi Gurbanov
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State Committee on Religious Associations
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Thank you, Mr. Moderator

Distinguished delegates

I would like to draw your attention to the best practice as Azerbaijan comprises a manifestation of religious tolerance and multicultural values. For centuries, representatives of different religions, cultures lived in peace and dignity in Azerbaijan. Thus, in separate periods heathenism, Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and other religious beliefs were spread in the country and had a mutual influence on each other. And today many of religions which were spread in the country historically continue to maintain their existence, as well as new religious movements spread and operate freely throughout the country.

Unlike many other countries in the world, there is no discrimination, no social hostility and no organized manifestation of anti-Semitism in Azerbaijan. Jews have been peacefully lived for more than two thousand years among Muslims who make up around 96% of the population.

In 2011, as part of a set of initiatives to rebuild historic places of worship and along with renovation of old and foundation of new mosques, president of Azerbaijan initiated building of a new synagogue for the Mountain Jews.

Religious Leaders of Islam, Christian and Judaism do not compete against each other when preaching to their faith. All these elements have created specific culture of religious tolerance and interfaith solidarity. This is a country of which approximately 65 percent is Shia and 35 percent Sunni treat each other in a respectful manner.

In addition, Azerbaijani government observes multiculturalism as a state policy. Mutual cooperation of ethnic groups, tradition of tolerance and condemnation of all sorts of conflicts are core principle of this policy. A number of legislative acts that prohibit ethnic, racial and religious hatred and enmity have been adopted in our country.

Changes to the legal system in the field of religion, developments in this sphere have played an important role in a more consistent implementation of the freedom of conscience, determination of the status, rights and duties of religious organizations, as well as regulation of relations regarding activities of religious organizations. No discrimination against members of the religious communities in Azerbaijan experienced by the state bodies while laws protect fundamental rights of them in our country.

As a part of the multiculturalism policy, in 2014, Baku International Multiculturalism Center (BIMC) and Service of the State Counsellor on Multiculturalism, Interethnic and Religious Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established. The establishment of BIMC is an

institutional level to promote multicultural values in the direction of protection of the culture, language, religion and traditions of dominant groups and minorities.

Institutional development helps to export Azerbaijani model of Multiculturalism to the world. Consequently, multiculturalism of Azerbaijan currently is taught 15 overseas universities. It should be also noted that, by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2016 has been declared as the Year of Multiculturalism for preservation, further development and wide range of promotion of the traditions of multiculturalism. In the meantime, hundreds of workshops, meetings, roundtables, conferences on fighting religious radicalism and extremism, promulgating national and moral values, promoting traditions of tolerance and values of multiculturalism have been organized and held by the State Committee on Religious Associations in the different regions of Azerbaijan within first quarter of the year. Azerbaijan becomes home of international humanitarian conferences as a result of successful implementation of multiculturalism policy. Every second year the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, which brought up to 600 delegates from about 100 countries is taking place in Azerbaijan while Baku International Humanitarian Forum regularly hosted. A main idea is how to bring representatives of different religions together and how to establish more understanding between us. As Azerbaijan is a secular country due to its constitution, the government always takes care of religious communities without any discrimination.

In 2016, financial aid (link: <http://president.az/articles/20524>) from the President`s Reserve Fund has been allocated to support religious communities and upgrade their financial condition. The amount nominated to the non-Islamic religious associations is committed due to the number of their followers.

Also, we are as a country support principles of tolerance by protecting religious -historical monuments belonged to the different religions as a part of historical heritages. Armenian Church is still stands not only undamaged in central Baku but also renovated by Azerbaijani government while almost all mosques and other religious (Islam) – historical temples have been destroyed or desecrated in the occupied territories by Armenia.

In the conclusion we suggest the OSCE ODIHR to appreciate Azerbaijan`s policy on state-religion relation and explore applicability of Azerbaijani practices on tolerance and multiculturalism in the other countries. Azerbaijani government continues to support religious communities amid humanitarian and economic crisis where some countries around the globe failed.

Thank you for your attention!