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**STATEMENT BY
MR. REFAT CHUBAROV, NATIONAL DEPUTY OF UKRAINE, AT
THE OSCE CONFERENCE ON ANTI-SEMITISM AND ON OTHER
FORMS OF INTOLERANCE**

Cordoba, 8 and 9 June 2005

Mr. Chairman,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

From the moment it proclaimed its independence, the Ukrainian State has been systematically restructuring social relations, based on the observance of human rights and freedoms.

For a multi-ethnic and multi-denominational country like Ukraine, the first years of independence were very important, as society, feeling a great need for the revival of its spiritual foundations in organizing itself, sought new forms and priorities for State policy in the area of religious life.

Under Article 35 of the Constitution of Ukraine, citizens of Ukraine are guaranteed the right to freedom of conscience and religion. In that same connection, the equality of the rights and duties of citizens is also ensured by the provision establishing that “the church and religious organizations in Ukraine shall be separate from the State, and schools from the church” and also by the directive that “no religion may be recognized as mandatory by the State”.

According to official figures, some 55 confessions are represented in Ukraine. In terms of the number of believers, Islam is the second religion in Ukraine after Christianity. The majority of the Muslim communities of Ukraine — 335 out of 467 — are found in the Crimea, because the bulk of the Muslim Umam of Ukraine — the Crimean Tartars — live on the Crimean peninsula.

In Ukraine, Islam is an integral part of the country’s history and culture, because for centuries Ukraine has straddled the border between the Christian and Muslim worlds. What is more, the Ukrainian State also incorporates within its present-day borders territories where Islam has been the dominant religion for centuries.

Despite a developed national legislation guaranteeing equal treatment by the State of its citizens in religious life regardless of their faith or their membership of an ethnic or other kind of group, the task of strengthening mutual understanding and tolerance between

religious organizations of different faiths and also among believers within individual confessions is still of relevance in Ukraine.

The reason for this is to be found in the tragic events of our recent history. During the *Golodomor* alone, the Great Famine unleashed on the territory of Ukraine by the former Soviet regime in the early 1930s, more than 7 million human lives were lost. The total deportation of the Crimean Tartars from their historic homelands, which was accompanied by tens of thousands of deaths, and their forced detention in places of exile for more than 45 years meant that there was a real risk that an entire people would disappear.

Understandably, to justify such monstrous atrocities the Communist regime of the USSR fostered ideologies in the mind of the public on a massive scale that were designed to create negative stereotypes of the victims of these crimes. One of the most important and difficult tasks facing Ukrainian society today, including the authorities and religious organizations, is that of overcoming these myths.

Another objective reality for post-Soviet States, including Ukraine, is the fact that supporters of authoritative methods for governing society do not easily give up their established views on social order and human rights in a multi-ethnic and multi-denominational society. This is why defining equality of human rights and freedoms, including religious life, by law does not automatically guarantee the observance of citizens' rights in Ukraine.

Looking impartially at the internal development of Ukrainian society, it is evident that in the overwhelming majority of cases the emergence of conflict situations involving religious organizations and religious members of society is politically motivated. Put more simply, some people involved in Ukrainian politics are constantly tempted to use religion and the religious members of society as a distinctive political tool to achieve their own goals.

These tendencies manifest themselves particularly clearly during election campaigns, when special PR events are used to manipulate the religious sentiments of citizens to get the electorate to vote the way the politicians want them to. For example, during the recent presidential elections in Ukraine, the campaign offices of some candidates frequently overstepped the mark in terms of basic decency and tolerance regarding the religious sentiments of Ukrainian citizens of different faiths, including Muslims. Although, in this case, thanks to the religious and ethnic tolerance inherent in Ukrainian society, everything ended well — Mr. Viktor Yushchenko, a genuinely religious person who sincerely respects people of all religions, was elected President of Ukraine — the election campaign nevertheless caused a considerable amount of tension in relations between different religious groups, something which the new authorities need to overcome.

Needless to say, it will not be easy to create the conditions for the unconditional observance of the right to freedom of religion in a society in which until recently atheism and all that that entails was the State ideology. In that connection, we realize that in many areas of society, especially school education, military service and the functioning of State institutions, we in Ukraine are just beginning our search for appropriate ways of observing the right to freedom of religion.

We should also mention the extremely important role played by the media in terms of religious tolerance in society. In this regard, the foreign media may have as much influence in

some situations as our own information systems. In our view, the openness of the information space of a particular country must not be used to introduce false stereotypes from the outside to serve particular political interests. For example, we take an extremely negative view of Ukrainian television channels showing films or other programmes in which instead of an honest and unbiased coverage of conflicts and references to the real reasons behind them, the arguments are brought down to the most primitive level. This is why it is still extremely important that international European organizations, including the OSCE, continue to develop standards and principles to help to establish religious tolerance. We believe it would be useful to include recommendations on this subject in the final document that will be adopted at the end of our conference.

Thank you for your attention.