

STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF GREECE**-RIGHT OF REPLY-****Working session 6: Tolerance and non-discrimination I**

In reply to two NGO statements, I would like to stress that the region of Thrace is an example of harmonious and successful living together of a Christian majority and a Muslim minority. Any incident which may -or may not-be identified as hate crime is thoroughly investigated.

The Ministry of Education takes special care for the promotion of the religious and spiritual cultivation of Muslims in Thrace, where 260 mosques are in operation. Thus, all Muslim minority pupils, at public schools in Thrace, have the possibility to be taught the Quran at school, and not at special classes, by Islamic Religion teachers specially appointed by the State at the Muftiates of Thrace.

The Ministry of Education has decided to launch a pilot program in six public kindergartens in Thrace, where alongside the main educator in the classroom there will be language facilitators in the mother tongue of the children. It is to be noted that, as recognized by the relevant OSCE documents, it is of paramount importance for minority children to learn the language of the country in which they are living, otherwise they cannot be active members of this society

Turning to a different issue, proper legal adjustments have been made in order to expedite the construction of the Athens Mosque, which has already begun and is nearing completion. Its Board of Directors, in which two representatives of the Muslims who live in Attica participate, has already been appointed. Furthermore, eight Muslim houses of prayer, complying with urban-planning, safety and health regulations, have been licensed.