

Human Rights Without Frontiers Int'l

Avenue d'Auderghem 61/16, 1040 Brussels

Phone/Fax: 32 2 3456145

Email: international.secretariat.brussels@hrwf.net – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net>

No Entrepise: 0436.787.535

TVA: BE 0436787535



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting

Warsaw, 3 October 2012

Working Session 14 : Tolerance and non-discrimination II

Religious hate speech on internet and in the public space in Russia

In the last few years, some members of the *Expert Council for Conducting State Religious-Studies Expert Analysis at the Justice Ministry of Russia* have been repeatedly criticized by scholars and leaders of religious minorities in Russia for spreading hate speech on internet against non-Orthodox religious movements.

The head of the Expert Council, Alexander Dvorkin, and his colleague Aleksander Kuzmin were specifically mentioned on several occasions.

Alexander Dvorkin

Alexander Dvorkin is also the vice-president of FECRIS, an umbrella organization grouping together 25 European anti-sect organizations, and the president of St. Irenaeus of Lyons Centre, a missionary faculty department of St Tikhon's Orthodox University in Moscow which is FECRIS member association in Russia.

The Centre's website lists numerous "sects and cults", of which the most familiar and established in Russia include: charismatic Protestants (termed "neo-Pentecostals" by Dvorkin and his supporters), Hare Krishna devotees, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and the New Apostolic Church.

Among Dvorkin's many attacks on such groups is his conclusion to a paper on "Neo-

Pentecostalism in Russia", delivered at an April 2001 conference on "Totalitarian Sects – Threat of the 21st Century" in Nizhny Novgorod. He describes the faith of charismatic Protestants as, "a crude magical-occult system with elements of psychological manipulation (..) an anti-Biblical teaching furthering the personal enrichment of its pastors and the dissemination of false teachings originating in pagan cults."

In his lectures and his writings, he constantly attacks Falun Gong, the Baha'is, the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Pentecostals and others. They are all said to be destructive sects.

He accuses **Falun Gong** of being supported by the United States in the latter's fight against China.

He describes the **Mormons** as a huge international business corporation that operates under the guise of a religious organization, is close to the CIA and spies on Russia for the Americans.

He presents the **Neo-Pentecostals** as mentally handicapped, claiming that according to studies, which were never identified, "in 93% of cases the mental condition of members of the Neo-Pentecostal sect "*Word of Life*" has deteriorated, 63% had intrusive thoughts about a suicide, and 25% tried to commit a suicide."

This sort of language is not different from some disgusting statements against Muslims, Jews or homosexuals which are being criminalized in an increasing number of countries. False rumours, false accusations, insults against a specific social group can be equated with religious xenophobia and racism and this cannot be tolerated by State authorities in any country.

Aleksander Kuzmin is the head of the Saratov section of St. Irenaeus of Lyons Centre and runs a website on which he posts virulent anti-sect statements and accusations. In an open letter to Saratov residents condemning a Protestant campaign promoting Christian social activism, he mainly attacked the *Word of Life* Pentecostal Church, and portrayed it as "a horribly destructive sect". Kuzmin also wrote a leaflet alleging that "Krishnaites are involved in the drugs and arms trade" and "are prepared to murder on religious grounds", and that "beatings and rapes of teenagers in closed children's homes are attributed to Krishnaites." On 26 March 2009 Khabarovsk Central Municipal Court ruled his leaflet extremist.

At the FECRIS conference on "totalitarian sects," held in St Petersburg on 15-16 May 2009, Alexander Kuzmin, spoke on "The Neo-Pentecostal Threat to Russia's State Security".

Another Council member has urged Muslims to burn Islamic books banned as extremist.

This form of religious hate speech by these and other non-state actors has resulted in threats, physical attacks, vandalism and arsons of places of worship. Jehovah's Witnesses have documented and published online over 1,000 cases of mistreatment throughout Russia in the last three years: verbal abuse and. An interactive map and a chronological listing (See

http://www.jw-media.org/rus/incidents_map_e.htm) provide the location and a detailed description of each incident.

Russia is not only a Participating State of the OSCE but it is also a U.N. Member State.

In his Report of 15 December 2010 to the sixteenth session of the Human Rights Council (A/HRC/16/53), Heiner Bielefeldt, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief and successor of Asma Jahangir, stated:

Indeed, in many countries members of religious or belief minorities experience a shocking degree of public resentment or even hatred which is often nourished by a paradoxical combination of fear and contempt. Even tiny groups are sometimes portrayed as "dangerous" because they are alleged to undermine the social cohesion of the nation, due to some mysteriously "infectious" effects attributed to them. Such allegations can escalate into fully fledged conspiracy theories fabricated by competing groups, the media or even State authorities. At the same time, members of religious or belief minorities are often exposed to public contempt based for instance on rumours that they allegedly lack any moral values. It is exactly this combination of demonizing conspiracy projections and public contempt that typically triggers violence either directed against members of minorities or occurring between different communities. Hence the eradication of stereotypes and prejudices that constitute the root causes of fear, resentment and hatred is the most important contribution to preventing violence and concomitant human rights abuses. §29

The behaviour of some Orthodox personalities and state institutions in Russia is a disgrace to the Orthodox Church, as a famous British Orthodox believer who won the prestigious Templeton Prize told *Human Rights Without Frontiers*, and it is a disgrace to the Russian State.

Human Rights Without Frontiers recommends to

the Russian Orthodox Church

- to forbid religious hate speech in its ranks
- to promote a culture of tolerance in its institutions
- to sanction the members of its clergy who would continue to fuel hatred and intolerance against non-Orthodox minorities

the Russian State

- to protect religious minorities against hate speech, stereotypes and prejudices
- to educate its people about religious tolerance and non-discrimination
- to sanction people in its institutions who fan the fire of religious intolerance and discrimination.

