

Dear Ambassador Strohal, ambassadors of all member nations, NGO's, and friends, I would like to begin by saying that it a great honor for me to be with you during this session of ODIHR's Human Dimensions Implementation Meeting.

My name is BB Govinda Swami. I am the Coordinator of the International Society for Krishna Consciousness in Central Asia. Our society represents the devotional division of the Hindu Religion.

The Krishna Society has been experiencing serious problems for the past few years in Kazakhstan. In 1999 members of the society purchased 47 hectares of land outside of the commercial capital of Almaty. Through a series of legal transactions the land was privatized and purchased by the Krishna Society in 2004.

Members of the society began purchasing ruined cottages in the area of the 47 hectare land and a small community of Hindus began to develop.

Since arriving in the area there has been a consistent uncooperative spirit shown by the local administration. It has involved confiscation of the legal documents of members, deportation of members who have been legally registered, not allowing spiritual programs to be conducted, and abuse of the Hindu religion in newspapers and television.

In 2004 the local government started a process of litigation to effect the confiscation of the properties and destruction of the homes of Hindus. That process is still in effect.

The issue began an appeal from Hindu Organizations throughout the world that the Kazakhstan government intervene in the issue, stop the discrimination against the Hindus, and find a just and peaceful resolve.

The Kazakhstan government has responded to all appeals by stating that there is no case of religious discrimination and that the issue is of a purely economic nature.

Despite having great respect for the leaders of Kazakhstan we sorely disagree with their conclusion.

There is a document from the Almaty state department of justice, in response to an inquiry by the Almaty state governor, outlining a plan of how to liquidate the Krishna Society. It clearly defines that through the court system the land and homes should be confiscated and the process should end in the liquidation of the society.

All of the residences in the area are basically in the same legal position. But only Hindus have been selected for litigation with the result of confiscation and destruction.

The Government Committee of Religion repeatedly claims that we are the only religious Organization to occupy so much land. But in the Kazakh constitution there is no restriction to such ownership.

Five days prior to the Congress of World Religions which was conducted on September 2006 an inter agency commission was established by the Kazakhstan Government to look into the “land issues surrounding the Hindu Religion in Karasai District of Almaty State”.

We were strongly told that we could not participate in the commission with our advocates. But, if the issue were only economic how can it be resolved without advocates?

I may add that we included in our delegation three human rights observers from Kazakhstan, Mrs. Ninel Constantinovna Fokina, of Helsinki Human Rights and presidents commission on human rights, Evgeniy Alexandrovich Zhovtis, of the International Bureau for Human Rights, and Lisa Zhumahmetova of OSCE.

Through the government said the commission was organized to look at the economic issues of the Hindus, representatives of traditional religions were requested to participate as well. All of our human rights advisors felt the presence of different faiths to be an irregularity in discussing the “economic issues of the Krishna Hindus“. During the sessions of the commission respected representatives of traditional religions expressed that Hindus have no place in Kazakhstan.

During the work of the commission any positive comments regarding the Hindus were described as propaganda and entering and legal point from our advocates was seen as a deviation from the issue.

Only two members of the commission appointed in Astana visited the site where Hindus live. The local government brought busloads of unrelated village people and 4 television channels of Kazakhstan. The unrelated people chanted slogans and gave interviews against the Krishna Hindus.

But, when there was an outpouring of emotion and legal fact from the side of the Krishna Hindus the media was not present to film, as the officials had told them to leave.

And in the conclusion of the commission it was reported that there are no signs of discrimination or intolerance taking place.

Dear delegates, there is a serious problem going on in an area of Kazkhstan, a problem involving discrimination against a minority religion, a problem which is being supported by officers of the government.

The human rights specialists who I mentioned are present at this meeting. If you require their objective perspective I am sure they could inform you regarding this issue. I request that the members participating in this meeting to assist by offering advice how to correct this issue.