

The OSCE Secretariat bears no responsibility for the content of this document and circulates it without altering its content. The distribution by OSCE Conference Services of this document is without prejudice to OSCE decisions, as set out in documents agreed by OSCE participating States.

PC.DEL/372/21  
18 March 2021

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY MR. VLADIMIR ZHEGLOV,  
DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION,  
AT THE 1306th MEETING OF THE OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL  
VIA VIDEO TELECONFERENCE**

18 March 2021

**On the International Day to Combat Islamophobia**

Madam Chairperson,

This is undoubtedly a relevant topic that reaches far beyond the borders of our region, affecting all OSCE participating States. In this regard, the Russian Federation is also working actively with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, in which it has observer status.

Islam is among the “traditional” religions in Russia and is followed by millions of people from various regions. Interfaith and inter-ethnic harmony has always been one of our country’s distinctive features. In the words of President Putin: “Inter-ethnic and interreligious peace is of vital importance. Russia’s spiritual leaders have a special role to play in harmonizing inter-ethnic and interreligious relations to prevent extremism and terrorism.”

We should like to focus separately on the situation in Russian Crimea. The authorities pay systematic attention to serving the interests of the Crimean Tatar community, which includes ensuring their religious rights. We have already spoken about this today, but now I shall go into a little more detail. In December 2019, the Council on Interethnic and Interfaith Relations was established under the auspices of the Head of the Republic of Crimea. The deputy chairperson of the Council and rector of the Crimean Engineering and Pedagogical University, Mr. Chingiz Yakubov, an ethnic Crimean Tatar, was appointed to the Russian Federation’s Presidential Council for Interethnic Relations. Construction of a cathedral mosque for 4,000 people and a muftiate building are nearing completion in Simferopol. Incidentally, artists from Turkey took part in the interior decoration of the mosque. Since the reunification of the peninsula with Russia, several dozen mosques have been built. In total, there are more than 300 mosques and houses of worship in Crimea.

Every year in the Republic of Crimea, Muslim holidays are designated public holidays, a pilgrimage to Mecca is organized, and the process of obtaining international passports is simplified for Crimean participants in the annual hajj. In 2019, 975 Crimean Tatars participated in the hajj. For 2020, their hajj quota was increased to 1,000 people, but unfortunately the coronavirus pandemic intervened.

At an extended meeting of the Kurultay of the Muslims of Crimea in 2018, the Shura (Council) of Crimean Tatars was established to focus on strengthening interaction with regional authorities. The Shura is made up of respected cultural figures and clerics who have been elected to this body.

Meanwhile, in the OSCE area, intolerance towards Muslims is on the rise. Many countries have experienced a surge in anti-Islamic sentiment and an increase in violence by ultra-nationalists and in the desecration of mosques and religious symbols. Hate speech on social media and other media platforms, including at the instigation or even with the direct approval of officials, has long been commonplace. We recall that it is unacceptable to try to equate particular faiths with terrorism. That is why the words from the Koran are more relevant than ever: “Whoever does a good deed will be repaid tenfold.”

At the same time, this scourge, like any other, does not exist in isolation. It needs to be considered in conjunction with other similar problems.

For example, the rise of anti-Semitism in many OSCE participating States is a cause for concern. It is often accompanied by attempts to falsify the history of the Second World War and to revise the judgements of the Nuremberg Tribunal. Anti-Semitism takes various forms, including the desecration of monuments to Holocaust victims and those who saved the world from the horrors of National Socialism, the rise of neo-Nazi and right-wing extremist groups and the glorification of the Nazis and their collaborators. The Torah’s core message – “Thou shalt not hate thy brother” – should serve as a guide for future generations in countering this evil.

Christians, the religious majority in Europe, and Christianity, the foundation of European civilization, also face serious threats. In a number of countries, worshippers and members of the clergy have been attacked, persecuted, beaten and even killed. Moreover, in some cases this is not simply a matter of isolated incidents of religious intolerance, but a deliberate State policy aimed at dividing Christianity and the people along denominational lines, vilifying some and unjustly praising others. In the words of the Venerable Sergius of Radonezh: “Our salvation lies in love and unity.” In the context of the OSCE’s concept of comprehensive security, the great elder’s calls for unity are more relevant than ever in our times.

Madam Chairperson,  
Dear colleagues,

The OSCE has amassed a significant number of commitments to counter discrimination and intolerance, including on religious grounds. The time dictates that these should be clarified and that specific groups in need of protection should be identified. This was the very idea behind the Declaration on Enhancing Efforts to Combat Anti-Semitism adopted at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Basel in 2014. An instruction was also issued to elaborate separate declarations on combating intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions. We call on the Swedish Chairmanship to make this task a priority.