

OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND  
NON-DISCRIMINATION  
*Astana, 29-30 June 2010*

**Session 3: Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also focusing on  
intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions**

**Statement by Mr. Styopa Safaryan, Member of the National Assembly of the  
Republic of Armenia, Head of “Heritage” Parliamentary faction**

Expressing my gratitude to the moderator, introducers and previous speakers for outlining the topic of discussion and developing the concept of cultural heritage, in my intervention let me focus on the issues of Armenian Christian communities and their access to the cultural-spiritual heritage worldwide. While the Armenian Christian minority enjoys full protection of its right in most of Muslim countries, we are faced with concerning situation in two of our neighbouring participating States. Armenian identity and cultural heritage have been continuously subjected to discriminatory and intolerant attitude and actions—threats, assaults, pogroms, vandalism, desecration and annihilation of places of worship, cemeteries, and memorials.

In Turkey thousands of historic Armenian churches, monasteries and other religious, spiritual and secular treasures have been either damaged to the extent of becoming immediately subject to the threat of disappearance, or completely destroyed since the 1915 Genocide of Armenians. The policies of revision of history and Genocide denial for decades combined with legal provisions enhancing intolerance toward any opinion going against the state policy line have contributed to increased hate-attacks to which Hrant Dink—a prominent journalist and a devoted member of Turkey’s burgeoning civil society fall victim to. Public statements attempting to capitalise on the state of migrants for political purposes, not related to labour-rights or regulations and targeted against representatives of one nationality, only fuel further the discriminatory attitudes in the society curbing the free exercise of fundamental freedoms of the respective minority. In such context the Armenian minority cannot fully display its Christian or national identity. Although Turkish government and some local authorities have undertaken measures to reconstruct Surb Khach Church of Akhtamar and some other Armenian cultural monuments, the Armenian community is still deprived of holding religious services in many of them, being “generously” allowed to hold religious ceremony once a year.

In Azerbaijan the phenomena of Armenophobia are continuously fortified by unabating hate speech and bellicose rhetoric. Together with state-organised campaign of eradication of Armenian footprint from the country, this resulted in total destruction of seven-century old cemetery in Nakhichevan, misappropriation and desecration of Armenian religious monuments of Jugha. This policy amounts to brutal violation of Armenian minority basic human rights, and freedom of expression, conscience and believe and preservation of national identity most importantly.

All these discriminatory practices have been duly registered by UN and Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, yet they continue to go unaddressed. Obviously those few Armenians, who have stayed in Azerbaijan, cannot manifest their identity or to be protected in such atmosphere, while even Azerbaijanis, who express other than official point of view on historical facts and events, are brought to criminal responsibility. In this context we would like to make the following suggestions:

- to guarantee full manifestation of national and Christian identities of minority communities without fear of being attacked or persecuted, to eliminate legal articles and provisions impeding full realisation of basic human rights, and to make the Armenian cultural heritage available for the Armenian minority and the Armenian nation in general;
- to take measures to effectively stop anti-Armenian hysteria propagated in the society,
- to respect and realise fully those international obligations and commitments assumed within the framework of the European Cultural Convention and the Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe, and in particular those provisions which relate to the protection of Armenian cultural monuments which constitute an integral part of the common European and World cultural heritage;
- to conduct in good faith a comprehensive, integrated inventory of the Armenian cultural heritage located under their jurisdiction, and based thereon to develop a strategy for priority restoration of all ancient and mediaeval Armenian capital cities, churches, fortresses, cemeteries and other treasures.
- to send an independent expert mission to the region with the purpose of assessing the current state of the Armenian cultural heritage therein, and in particular, documenting the facts of vandalism in Nakhichevan and elsewhere already reported by the Armenian side.