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**STATEMENT BY MS. YELENA BUROVA,
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Distinguished conference participants,

Kazakhstan is a country of many different faiths and ethnic groups, where intensive processes related to identity, including religious identity, are taking place. Indicators of the migration of religions into Kazakhstan have risen sharply since the 1990s, and the religious map of the country has changed considerably. The shifting of world views among the population in connection with real pluralism has provided fertile soil for the spread of new religious groups (or those that are non-traditional in terms of our cultural and historical traditions). More liberal registration laws in Kazakhstan, as well as the traditionally tolerant environment characteristic of the Kazakh mentality, have served as further stimuli for rapid growth in the number of religious (and sometimes pseudo-religious) organizations with active operations in all parts of the country.

Public opinion polls of Kazakhs regarding the dynamics of and trends in religious activity show that real pluralism has taken hold in terms of our society's world views, and freedom of conscience has become a fundamental right enshrined in the Constitution. According to data from a survey of religious trends, which was conducted in all regions of Kazakhstan in July of this year, as many as two-thirds of the respondents associate themselves with religion in one way or another at this time, while 10 percent are active believers and are members of religious communities. As many as half of the Kazakhs surveyed believe that the influence of religion in our society is growing and view this as a positive trend. At the same time, according to data from experts, 20 per cent of Kazakhs do not adhere to any religious faith, and one out of six respondents said that they did not believe that religion had any positive influence on life in Kazakh society today.

Experts, scholars, teachers and parents have noted an increase in the number of cases of so-called "forced identification", in which unwitting individuals are drawn into new religious organizations (often operating under the guise of training classes, courses or counselling). Based on our own experience, in the past year alone there were confirmed reports of approximately 1,000 cases of this sort of deceptive recruitment of individuals, accompanied by the loss of property, physical health and psychological stability. In recent years, the victims themselves, their families, friends and teachers have started to turn more and more frequently to public organizations and law-enforcement authorities for assistance. Because of this, a 24-hour hotline (8-800-080-78-68) was launched in Kazakhstan in September of this year, and it can be used by anyone who needs to consult with a psychologist or lawyer concerning deceptive recruitment or the forcible detention of an individual in a pseudo-religious organization.

Considering geopolitical strategies and the role of Kazakhstan in maintaining stability in Central Asia, citizens are concerned about the possible involvement of the population in conflicts arising from religious factors. According to the public opinion poll, 12 per cent of the respondents believe that this sort of situation is entirely possible, and another 26 per cent believe that a turn of events along these lines is likely. As representatives of NGOs, we can understand the public's concern.

According to data from the public opinion poll, 49.8 per cent of the respondents from various social groups believe that activities organized and supported by so-called "non-traditional" religions and the corresponding religious organizations are harmful and only 4.7 per cent expressed a positive view of the need for and usefulness of these activities. More than 45 per cent of the respondents had a critical opinion of the activities of foreign proselytizers, and 49 per cent were in favour of government restrictions on these activities.

One out of three respondents believe that amendments should be made to the current laws regarding religion in Kazakhstan. The following suggestions were made:

- Tighten State control over the activities of religious organizations;
- Suspend the activities of pseudo-religious organizations that use individuals' desire for religious faith as a "cover" for their own business operations and spread ideas of social discord and opposition between the individual and society, and between citizens and the State;
- Increase parents' responsibility for the religious education of their children;
- Compile lists of traditional, new and pseudo-religions;
- Support religious studies as a school subject for students in upper grades;
- Set up special public commissions for monitoring the activities of religious organizations in terms of their influence in society.

I am expressing the opinion not only of public organizations that are opposed to the spread and establishment of pseudo-religions in Kazakh society, but also the opinion of experts. We believe that it is necessary to pool professional resources for the monitoring, recognition and identification of the destructive effects of pseudo-religions and to develop international mechanisms to block them and prevent their spread.

The OSCE can play a major role here, and that is why we are presenting a proposal to develop criteria for the definition of pseudo-religious activity and to apply these criteria in the monitoring of civil rights related to freedom of conscience.

Yelena Borova, doctor of philosophy, professor and vice president of the Perspective Public Foundation Informational and Advisory Group