

MUSLIM DENOMINATION IN BULGARIA

(Grand Mufti's Office in the Republic of Bulgaria)

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HUMAN RIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION MEETING OF THE ODIHR/OSCE

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Statement to working session 2: Tolerance and non-discrimination II

Thank you Madam moderator

Excellencies...

Distinguished guests,

On behalf of the Muslim denomination in Bulgaria I would like to thank the OSCE and ODIHR for the opportunity to address in this important forum.

Muslim community in Bulgaria increasingly concerned about the hate motivated incidents perpetrated against Muslims and holy sites, while acts of vandalism against mosques and cemeteries have become all too frequent.

Intolerant discourse and hate crimes increase and the feeling of insecurity among the targeted groups and inflame tensions in the society. These ideas of intolerance disseminate and support by aggressive nationalists, organisations and political formations which make statements to the detriment of Muslims' religious rights.

Under the influence of such extreme ideas mosques, sacred places and Muslim schools are offended in different places. It's hammered into citizens' mind that it is quite normal to violate Muslim relics, it is

not punishable and there are no consequences for the doers. Our disappointment is enhanced because in most cases the police do not understand us and do not undertake any professional engagements.

It's still fresh in our mind what happened in May 2011 during the Friday prayer at Sofia mosque, when the far-right nationalist party supporters and their leader attacked the worshipers, due to the fact that those who want to fulfill their prayer cannot get into the only temple in the city and do it on the sidewalk in front of the mosque, where they are subjected to profanity and physical harassment by political activists.

The most alarming is that there is no sentenced perpetrator for this violence and act of hostility to worshipers and the mosque.

Since 2012, the number of registered incidents by our office is more than 20. In 2013 there are 8 incidents:

1. *The windows of the "Haji Osman" mosque in Dobrich were broken in January 2013. The exact date and time of the incident is unknown. The Police have been informed.*
2. *On January 7, 2013, during the lunchtime prayer unknown persons threw stones at and shattered three windows of the mosque "Haji Osman" in Dobrich . One worshiper was wounded in the leg. The imam of the mosque reported the incident to the Police.*
3. *On 11.01.2013 Haji Osman mosque in Dobrich was attacked again. Unknown person or people had thrown stones at the windows of the mosque. This was the third attack on this mosque within a month. The Police have been notified of all the incidents.*
4. *On January 22, 2013 around 6:30 am when Muslims from Gotse Delchev went for Morning Prayer to the mosque on "Zvyncharska" street found a pig's head hanged on the front door. The worshipers had thrown the head in the garbage bin in order that enter in the temple for prayer. Regional Mufti's Office in Gotse Delchev notified the Police in written form (23 January 2013). Regional Mufti's Office in its letter to the Regional Prosecutor's Office informed about the provocations and incitements of the extreme nationalist parties VMRO, ATAKA and other moderate in their nationalism parties, which have incited and spread religious hatred and promoted tensions between religious communities in the region. Together with some regional media organized protest rallies against the intention of the Muslim community to build a mosque in the city.*

5. *On January 5, 2013 around 4 a.m. two young men threw stones and shattered the windows of Djumaya mosque in Plovdiv. Minutes after the incident officials of the Municipal Guard managed to detain the two young men (22 and 23 years old) and notified Police, where the perpetrators were detained for 24 hours. During the examination it was found that one of them is known to the Police. The Regional Prosecution Office has been notified of the case.*

6. *On January 8, 2013 Aziziye mosque in Varna woke up to find inscriptions on the walls like "Turks tremble with fear", "Levski is alive" (Levski is a national hero), "Bulgaria over everything". The inscriptions were seen by worshipers who informed the staff of the Regional Mufti's Office and the Imam of the mosque. The case was reported to the Police. After the inspection initiated preliminary proceeding against unknown perpetrators.*

7. *On March 7, 2013 unknown perpetrator splashed a paint on the facade of the Yali mosque in the town of Karlovo, inscribed with the following inscriptions: "Death to you, Turkish rabble" and painted swastika. Local media also reported the news on March 7, 2013. Preliminary proceedings have been initiated against unknown perpetrators.*

8. *On the night September 7, 2013, unknown persons have painted inscriptions "OUT!", "14/88" and a swastika on the fence of Aziziye mosque in Varna. The inscriptions were seen by worshipers. Regional Muti's Office in Varna reported the case to the Police with attached photos. Preliminary proceedings have been initiated.*

I'd like to notice that Grand Mufti's Office prepares annual reports on anti-Muslim hate incidents and send it to ODIHR and National authorities.

I also take this opportunity to congratulate ODIHR on its hate crime training activities in Bulgaria for NGOs two weeks ago.

With reference to the above mentioned matters I'd like to make the following recommendations to the Bulgarian authorities:

1. National authorities to ensure implementation of OSCE Ministerial Decision No. 9/09 on Hate Crime and OSCE Permanent Council Decisions 607 and 621 on Tolerance and the Fight against

Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, as well as other related commitments established by Ministerial Council decisions between 2003 and 2007;

2. To undertake specific measures in strengthening and implementing legislation and data collection mechanisms to address hate crime and in identifying and implementing good practices;
3. The authorities actively engage with civil society organizations to combat hate crimes and other manifestations of intolerance, whilst recognizing the independent role played by the latter;
4. To undertake specific measures so that attempts and actions of this nature against religious and ethnic groups as a whole will not be treated as “hooligan acts”, but will be considered as acts “threatening ethnic and religious peace” in the country and be punished strictly and uncompromisingly, regardless of ethnic and religious affiliation of the perpetrator and to whom they are directed;
5. The national authorities to implement the commitments of OSCE to address intolerance and discrimination by conducting awareness-raising activities, developing educational programmes in order to raise awareness among youth of the value of mutual respect and understanding, encouraging the establishment of national institutions and specialized bodies and co-operating with civil society;
6. The national authorities to submit periodically the annual hate crime list to ODIHR.

Recommendations to ODIHR/OSCE:

1. ODIHR should suggest specific measures to prevent intolerance, xenophobia and hate crimes;
2. ODIHR and other OSCE institutions, including the Personal Representatives of the Chairperson in Office on tolerance and non-discrimination issues, to undertake measures for better supporting OSCE participating States in implementing their commitments on tolerance and non-discrimination;
3. ODIHR to continue with the training programmes on responding to hate crimes and all kind of intolerance for law enforcement, educators, NGOs and representatives of religious organizations

Thank you for the attention!