

Association of Christian Churches “Union of Christians” (ACCR)
Bishop Igor Y. Nikitin, President of the ACCR
Written statement “New tendencies in the state of Evangelical churches in Russia”

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The Association of Christian Churches “Union of Christians” realizes monitoring of the freedom of conscience and religion in Russia and former Soviet Union countries since 1996. I present results of the research at the OSCE sessions every year. During these years the situation in OSCE region countries had changed substantively.

In 2006 year four main problems are shown in interreligious and interdenominational relationships:

- 1. Some forces in power structures strive to set up state religion in Russia and use Russian Orthodox Church with this aim.**
- 2. Alterations made into the Federal Law “About Nonprofit Organizations” had complicated the registration process and activities of religious organizations.**
- 3. Mass Media attack aggressively Evangelical Churches. Actions of the central television of Russia in this direction cause deep concern.**
- 4. Attempts to stop growth and activity of Evangelical churches by legislative limitation of missionary activity and public discrimination of believers.**

Obligatory study of a new subject - “Basics of the Orthodox Culture” had started since the 1 September in the schools for children of all nationalities and religions according to the decision of the official authorities.

The open letter of the parents concerning constraint on believers of other denominations during obligatory study of the subject in Belgorod region states: “during this lessons one religion and denomination raises itself through abasement of others, provoking religious intolerance in society.”

Alterations and amendments were made into the Federal Law “About Nonprofit Organizations” in February 2006. These alterations had complicated existence of religious organizations in Russia. Now officials have the right to interfere in all spheres of the Church life. New accountability of religious organizations provides stipulations when Churches have to inform Authorities not only about the Church members but about all volunteers. This accountability is so much complicated that issue going to underground appeared in front of small churches in Russia.

I am also concerned by the aggressiveness of the Mass Media, mainly television, in their attacking of the Evangelical Churches in Russia.

On the 07 of June 2006 the in the air of the 1 Channel “ORT” well-known all over Russia Christian Rehabilitation center “New Life” was publicly slandered and called “ the sect”.

On the 27 of September in the “Vesti” program, the officially registered Evangelical Church was called a destructive occult organization and sect.

In August the discussion of the draft of the Federal Law “About making of alterations in some of the federal laws with the aim to resist illegal missionary activities” had started in Russia.

The draft of the law actually outlaws missionary activity in Russia.

It provides:

Limitation of missionary activities in Educational institutions, medical and patient care institutions, orphanages, children's houses, old people's homes, and homes for invalids, in jails.

Considerable limitation of the activities of the foreign missionaries in Russia.

I am sure that this law shall not pass in this form.

The cases of discrimination of the believers, and violation of their rights by officials became more frequent.

On the 10 of August 2006 the Head of the Administration of the Cherepanov district in Novosibirsk region rejected the application of the Glukhov's married couple for the tutelage of the little girl from the Orphanage, based on their membership in Evangelical religious organization.

On the 14 June 2006 land surveyor of the Iglino village council in Bashkortostan demanded the Pastor to remove the Cross from the Evangelical church building.

This is not the complete list of the occurred events.

These problems in interreligious and interdenominational relationships arise as a result of insufficient juridical competence of the believers and pastors of Evangelical churches, state and municipal officials.

Believers and pastors are not aware of their rights, they don't take part in discussion of the law drafts, and they are not ready to protect their rights in courts. The courts are very slow, legal processes last for years.

Officials are insufficiently aware of the Russian legislature in the field of religion and respective international agreements.

In this connection, I would like to introduce following proposals for the OSCE:

- 1. To propose to the State-members of the OSCE to spread among the officials and judges of their countries information about international agreements in the field of religious freedoms, about the judicial opinion of the European Court of Human Rights;**
- 2. To recommend to the European Council to shorten the terms of examination of the cases about the violation of the rights of the believers in the former Soviet Union countries in the European Court of Human Rights.**

As a whole, the past year, in spite of toughening of the legal regulation of activities of the religious organizations in Russia, the positive tendency in persecution of evangelical churches could be outlined. This is not the achievement only of the Churches themselves, who are being evaluated by the society "for their deeds" and play more and more significant position in it. The important role is played by the Government of the Russian Federation, who is striving to reach certain harmony between different religions and nationalities in Russia.

Thank you.

