

Reply of Azerbaijani delegation on the matters that allegedly stated to be of concern in Azerbaijan

Session 12: Freedom of religion or belief

The followings should be noted regarding the made in this session misstatements about the religious affairs in Azerbaijan:

- The Republic of Azerbaijan is a multinational and multi-religious country. The principles of tolerance and joint coexistence of various nationalities, ethnic groups and religious minorities constitute the cornerstone of the national policy of this country. Freedom of religion and belief is guaranteed with article 25 of the constitution of Azerbaijan Republic.
- Baptists – the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan – enjoy all rights enshrined in the Constitution and no problems relating to their religious activities have been detected up to date. Several Christian Baptist religious communities were successfully registered and functioning in Azerbaijan.

And the Baptist pastor Hamid Shabanov's imprisonment was not due to his religious belief, as was stated, but rather because of possessing firearms, which is defined as a criminal act in article 228.1 (possessing firearms) of the Criminal Code of Azerbaijan Republic.

- The fact that some organization remains without registration has legal reasoning. If the religious group submits all required documents compiled in a properly manner, the registration is carried out without delay and in conformity with legislation.
- Regarding the import of religious literature, the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations (SCWRA) limits only literature imported to Azerbaijan which propagandizes religious intolerance, discrimination, radical religious thoughts and ideas and etc.

- Regarding Mushvig Mammadov and Samir Huseynov, the members of the Jehovah's witnesses, it must be noted that according to the second part of the article 76 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, it is permitted to substitute active military service for alternative service in cases as defined by Law. The draft Law governing the principles and the organizational-legal basis of alternative service in the Republic of Azerbaijan has already been developed and is currently under consideration at the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan.
- Until now the police within its competence checked-up meetings of the religious communities after getting reports about the breach of law. This happened only in cases if the activities of the religious group disturbed the others or when foreigners coming to Azerbaijan as tourists carried out religious propaganda. Just for information, the article 1 of the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Freedom of religious belief prohibiting the foreigners and persons without citizenship to conduct religious propaganda. There are no facts of prohibition of some religious community, restriction of its activities or arrest of its members as a result of activities carried out by police.

Thank you for attention!

07.10.2008