



# Open Doors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief.

## Religious Freedom in some OSCE countries

Moderator, distinguished guests,

Thank you for giving me the floor.

Open Doors International is advocating for full freedom of religion or belief for all, however, we are concentrating our efforts on those countries where Christians are persecuted or discriminated against.

Open Doors is participating in several inter-faith platforms such as the European Platform on Religious Intolerance and Discrimination (EPRID). However, freedom of religion or belief does not only affect religious minorities. It also guarantees the right not to adhere to any religion and is thereby fundamental for all of us and worthwhile defending.

**Kazakhstan** will soon be the OSCE Chair in Office. This is of course an honour for the Kazakh authorities but it is not for free. It goes with a thorough investigation in the human rights situation in the country.

Open Doors welcomes the decision of the Kazakh president to put on hold a draft law on religion after the Constitutional Council of Kazakhstan ruled the law unconstitutional. However, the current law on religion is far from flawless as well.

Several religious communities and leaders in Kazakhstan have been punished for non-registered religious activities, however, a registration process for religious groups may never limit the legitimate wish of any



citizen to exercise the right to freedom of religion or belief freely and peacefully.

We urge Kazakhstan to review all current legislation affecting freedom of religion or belief, using the expertise available in the OSCE.

Open Doors further calls upon the Kazakh government to ensure that media do not present a distorted picture of any faith group.

In **Turkmenistan**, any unregistered religious activity, including people meeting together for worship in private homes, is banned and religious literature is censored. The consequences for breaching the law are serious. This was also addressed during the Universal Periodic Review of Turkmenistan last year in Geneva.

We welcome the fact that Turkmenistan accepted several recommendations regarding the right to freedom of religion or belief and we urge President Berdimuhamedov and his government to implement without delay recommendations such as those by Italy and Germany calling for measures to grant effective and unhindered enjoyment of religious freedom.

Mr. Moderator, last year, I already mentioned the plight of Pentecostal preacher Dmitry Shestakov of **Uzbekistan** who has been sentenced to four years labour camp for illegal religious practice in 2007. Open Doors calls for his immediate release.

Onerous registration requirements still affect all non-traditional faith groups in Uzbekistan and penalties on illegal religious practice are high as is illustrated by the case of Dmitry Shestakov. We therefore urge the government to review its legislation.

Further, Open Doors calls upon the government of Uzbekistan to stop the negative stereotyping of religious minorities in the media immediately and to hold the perpetrators to account. This would be a very important signal to both the religious minority groups and to the society as a whole.

Distinguished delegates, with these examples from just three OSCE countries, I can just call upon you all to work towards full freedom of religion or belief in the OSCE region respectfully yet decisively and with the necessary sense of urgency.

Thank you for your attention,

Mr. Arie de Pater