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**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1514th MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

27 March 2025

On commitments regarding tolerance and non-discrimination

Mr. Chairperson,

As a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional State, the Russian Federation attaches the utmost importance to the development of intercultural and interreligious dialogue. We are convinced that the diversity of religious traditions and particularities of historical development should be a unifying factor for the international community, and not a dividing one.

Our country was among the co-sponsors of the United Nations General Assembly resolution that, in 2022, established the International Day to Combat Islamophobia, which has been observed annually since then on 15 March.

We are obliged to note that the situation as regards Islamophobia in the OSCE area remains unfavourable. What is more, this state of affairs is partly due to the blatant connivance of local authorities. A case in point is the numerous instances of the Qur'an being burned in Denmark, Sweden and other European countries.

We emphasize our position of principle that it is inadmissible to justify actions that offend the feelings of believers and incite interreligious enmity. No reference to the allegedly absolute nature of freedom of speech can justify such blasphemous actions.

We should like to remind the representatives of a number of countries of the collective West in attendance here, who are so fond of talking in high-flown terms about the need for other States to respect human rights, of their own OSCE commitments to respect "freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion".

According to the latest figures from the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, one in two Muslims in the EU are victims of "racism and discrimination in everyday life".

The percentage of Muslims facing racial discrimination has increased from 39 to 47 per cent. Potentially, we are talking about over 13 million people. It is worth bearing in mind that Muslims constitute the second largest religious group in the European Union.

Between October 2021 and October 2022, the Fundamental Rights Agency surveyed nearly 10,000 Muslims in 13 EU countries. The results were disappointing. Austria was found to be the most Islamophobic, with 71 per cent of Muslims subjected to discrimination, followed by Germany and Finland. In general, young people and women were the most vulnerable.

Islamophobia mainly manifests itself in employment and in the field of housing rights. According to the survey, 39 per cent of Muslims experience discrimination when looking for work and 35 per cent encounter it in the workplace. The situation is made worse by the dehumanizing anti-Muslim rhetoric that prevails in Europe.

Things are no better in Europe when it comes to anti-Semitism and Christianophobia.

According to a report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, Jews in the EU continue to face high levels of anti-Semitism. The number of anti-Semitic incidents in Austria and Sweden increased by more than 400 per cent in October–December 2023 compared with the same period in 2022.

The Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities and the Foundation against Racism and Anti-Semitism (Swiss non-governmental organizations) report that in Switzerland in 2024 the number of crimes committed against Jews increased to 221 offences, which is four times higher than in 2022.

According to a report published in 2024 by the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe (OIDAC Europe), another non-governmental organization, nearly 2,500 anti-Christian hate crimes were identified in 35 European countries, including 232 personal attacks on Christians.

Human rights defenders note in that report that there is widespread discrimination against Christians in the workplace and in various spheres of public life in Europe. The expression of traditional religious beliefs is increasingly met with hostility and can lead to discrimination and bullying at work or even loss of employment.

It is getting to the point where traditional Christian beliefs, such as the conviction that God created man and woman, may be labelled as “discriminatory”. People may have to pay a price for saying such things. This forces many Christians, particularly among the younger generation, to self-censor or hide their beliefs, notably in educational institutions and in the workplace.

The most unfavourable situation in 2023 was in France with almost 1,000 anti-Christian attacks, including 84 cases of assault.

In the United Kingdom, the number of anti-Christian hate crimes in England and Wales rose to 702 in 2023, which was 15 per cent more than in 2022.

In Germany, such crimes saw a worrying increase of 105 per cent between 2022 and 2023, rising to 277 cases. OIDAC Europe reports that there were at least 2,000 cases of unlawful property damage to Christian places of worship in that country in 2023.

In Finland, a member of parliament has been on trial since 2019 on charges of “hate speech” after posting a quote from the Bible on social media and questioning how the Lutheran Church could find it compatible with the Bible to sponsor Helsinki Pride, an LGBT event.

We continue to be particularly concerned about the Ukrainian Government’s repressive policy towards canonical Orthodoxy in Ukraine. On the basis of discriminatory legislation in that country, places of worship belonging to the Ukrainian Orthodox Church are being seized and its congregations are being forcibly re-registered and dissolved. These measures have been accompanied by an upsurge in violence against worshippers and members of the clergy. Politically motivated criminal proceedings are being instituted against priests and parishioners. At the same time, a large-scale propaganda campaign is being waged against the Ukrainian Orthodox Church in the Ukrainian media.

Especially sacrilegious is the so-called inspection of the relics of saints in the catacombs of the Kyiv Monastery of the Caves initiated by the “Ministry of Culture of Ukraine”. Moreover, these activities by “experts” are being carried out without public scrutiny. There are good grounds for believing that the relics may be damaged, destroyed or even spirited away to Western countries.

But evidently no crimes on the part of the Kyiv regime, even the most brutal ones, will make the EU bloc and the authorities in London reconsider their extremely “Ukrainianized” agenda, which they continue to blindly follow.

Attempts to divide canonical Orthodoxy in other European countries, including Estonia and Moldova, are utterly indefensible too.

We strongly condemn all such acts of intolerance, which are a manifestation of sacrilegious barbarism and xenophobia and should have no place in the OSCE area or anywhere else in the world. We call upon the authorities of European countries to stop condoning the rise in interreligious enmity and hate speech, and urge the relevant institutions of the Organization to respond publicly to these egregious cases.

It is our belief that, in addition to the issue of anti-Semitism, similarly close attention needs to be paid to efforts to combat intolerance towards Christians and Muslims as well. The tasking from the 2014 Basel Ministerial Council meeting with regard to drafting declarations on combating discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions has yet to be implemented to this day.

In closing, we should like to recall that the joint statement by a group of OSCE participating States on enhancing efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions (Malta, 6 December 2024) remains open for alignment.

Thank you for your attention.