

Right of Reply by the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia

Working session 7: Fundamental freedoms, including:

- **Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief**

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It's regretful to see how an Azerbaijani NGO voiced groundless accusations against my country Armenia, which promotes adherence to international human rights instruments and firm commitments to ensuring freedom of religion. Armenians know what it means to be a persecuted religious group, that's why it is a duty for us to pledge support to all those who are persecuted, including on the basis of their religion and belief. Armenia became a safe haven for a number of vulnerable religious minorities, including Yazidis and Assyrians. Today Yazidis are the strongest minority group in Armenia, and the biggest temple of this ancient people very soon will open in their Armenian homeland. Together with the most ancient Christian churches of the world and magnificent Blue Mosque of Yerevan it will symbolize beauty of faith and tolerance.

Meanwhile almost all international human rights watchdogs continuously report on the appalling situation of human rights in Azerbaijan, where the dictatorial government exercises control over all spheres of public life. With regard to the religious freedom conditions there are grave concerns about the mandatory registration requirements, imprisonment and torture of individuals for their beliefs, confiscation of religious materials which had not received the government approval, restrictions on the distribution of religious literature and many others. closure of places of worship. As an example of the destruction of religious sites I would like to remind about Azerbaijani acts of annihilation of thousands of medieval Armenian cross-stones and destruction of 7th century Armenian church in Nakhichevan, which have been very well documented with videos and photos.

Given these facts thoroughly instructed Azerbaijani GONGOs in this room should stop manipulating the public opinion with repeated false claims of "tolerance" in their country.

Thank you.