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OSCE - ODIHR SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING

FEEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF

10th July 2009, Hofburg, Vienna

RUSSIA

"New Inquisition" in Russia: Christian communities appeal for help!!!

Association of Christian Churches "Union of Christians"

P.O Box 8 St. Petersburg 190005 Russian Federation, www.accr.ru,

Letter of Appeal

June 9, 2009

Dear Sir / Madam,

On behalf of Russian Evangelical Churches and thousands of believers throughout Russia we appeal to you to attract your attention to an outstanding situation we have today in the area of religious freedom and human rights in Russia.

In April 2009 Ministry of Justice of Russian Federation founded a Committee on Religious Expertise. The Committee has the right to control and monitor activities of already registered religious organizations. In fact they are persecuting those who are not of the Orthodox Christian Faith. The Committee members have the right to speak out on behalf of the Russian Government and give recommendations to the Enforces of the Law to persecute Evangelical religious organizations. Now our freedom of consciousness and belief is put under this Committee's decisions. The same measures were only delegated to the Committee on Religion during the Soviet regime.

At the end of April Association of Christian Churches “Union of Christians”(ACCR) already received a request of unscheduled inspection of its activities and documentations. The ACCR is registered in the Organization on Security and Cooperation in Europe as non-government organization and monitors situation of religious freedom in Russia and CIS countries.

The same request was received by other religious organizations and non-profit partnerships throughout Russia such as Russian Bible Society and World Christian Council. We are requested to give to the Ministry of Justice additional financial reports for the years of 2006-2009, and especially reports about donations from the foreign organizations and persons, though we gave all the necessary annual financial reports through these years in time. We are also to give them expertise on our literature and detailed information regarding our missionary activity.

Encouraged by the Committee, representatives of the Ministry of Justice have started blaming and disrupting social work of non-orthodox Churches in Russia. Members of the Committee are promoting a dangerous idea that evangelical believers are guilty for the economic and social crisis in Russia. The same situation took place in Nazi Germany when blaming Jews’ for all problems at once.

We are concerned that ignition of xenophobia in our society may start a wave of persecution and emigration among evangelical believers and many Christian congregations may start functioning underground.

Today leaders of religious organizations in different parts of Russia gather special meetings to discuss this situation of new Committee on Religion Expertise. We are receiving thousands of responses from believers with requests to protect them from discrimination and exposure of xenophobia in our society.

Writing this letter we ask you, as a leader of Human rights’ defending organization, to give your voice to protect freedom of consciousness and belief in Russia.

May God bless you.

With respect,

Bishop Igor Y. Nikitin,

President of the Association of Christian Churches “Union of Christians”