

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
THE DELEGATION OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE
SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING ON
FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF**

Vienna, 9 and 10 July 2009

Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished colleagues,

The Russian Federation is a multiconfessional State in which historically there has been a tradition of good-neighbourly coexistence of the followers of different religions. There are more than 22,000 religious organizations in our country representing various denominations. They form an integral part of public life and are actively involved in social, voluntary, cultural, publishing, educational and artistic endeavours. More than 11,000 organizations representing the Russian Orthodox Church, 3,700 Muslim religious organizations, around 4,000 Protestant associations, 290 Jewish communities, 200 Buddhist communities, 250 Catholic parishes and approximately 20 Catholic orders are active in Russia.

The way in which the question of religion is dealt with by the law is indicative of the attitude in Russia towards religion and religious associations. Russian legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations contains a multitude of legal acts and norms of international law reflected in the Constitution of the Russian Federation, international treaties to which Russia is a party, federal laws and other statutory instruments of our country and its territories and republics concerned with the exercise by human beings and citizens of the right to freedom of conscience. All in all, more than 100 statutory instruments are in force in our country: decrees issued by the President of the Russian Federation, decisions of the Government of the Russian Federation, decisions of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation, and ministerial and departmental acts dealing with freedom of conscience and the activities of religious associations.

The leaders of the major religious organizations are included in the consultative and advisory bodies set up under the President of the Russian Federation (Council for Co-operation with Religious Associations) and the Government of the Russian Federation (Commission on Religious Associations). No governmental decisions of importance in the area of religious relations are taken without consulting with religious leaders.

The Interreligious Council of Russia has been in operation in the country since 1998. This Council is made up of representatives of the country's main traditional religions

(Orthodox Christianity, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism). The basic aim of the Council's work is to co-ordinate the efforts of religious associations to consolidate social peace in the country, develop relations between religion and society, strengthen public morality and preserve and revive the spiritual and cultural legacy of the peoples of Russia.

I should like to draw attention to the fact that it was the Interreligious Council of Russia working in close co-operation with the Russian Orthodox Church that launched the World Summit of Religious Leaders, a major international forum convened for the first time in Moscow in 2006.

As a representative of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I should like to point out that the Ministry attaches great importance to religious issues and co-operates closely with the country's main religious organizations.

Since 2003 there has been a working group on interaction between the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Russian Orthodox Church. The group's format makes it possible to examine various problems promptly and to find ways of resolving of them and jointly promote the Russian view of intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the international arena.

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs is stepping up co-operation with Muslim associations in the country. The Advisory Council for Co-operation between the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Russian Muslim Organizations has been in operation since 2007. We believe that Russia's participation as an observer in the work of the Organization of the Islamic Conference provides Muslims in our country with wide-ranging opportunities for co-operation with the Islamic world. The Ministry assists Russian pilgrims with the annual hajj to Saudi Arabia. The Tenth International Koran Recital Competition was held in Moscow on 21 June of this year.

The Ministry supports working contacts with the Advisory Council of the Heads of Protestant Churches in Russia. Relations between government agencies and Protestant organizations are by and large of a constructive nature. The leaders of Protestant associations are invited to official State receptions and they participate in meetings of the Governmental Commission on Religious Associations as well as in various important public events. They organize an annual prayer breakfast to which representatives of the Government and public figures are invited.

The Ministry also maintains working contacts with the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia on various issues of mutual interest. In line with instructions issued by the President of the Russian Federation, the Presidential Council for Co-operation with Religious Associations includes the secretary-general of the Conference of Catholic Bishops of Russia.

The task of ensuring sustainable peace today calls for mutual understanding and respect for the diverse cultures, traditions and religious customs of the peoples along with collectively agreed actions involving all the interested parties in the international community.

In that context, the promotion of Russian initiatives to provide for interreligious dialogue is of fundamental importance to us.

We advocate the effective use of the opportunities afforded by the United Nations for strengthening interconfessional dialogue as a prerequisite for achieving the organization's basic goals, namely for ensuring international peace and security, socio-economic development and human rights. The Russian initiative calling for the creation under the auspices of the United Nations of an advisory council of religions, which was announced by the Russian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr. Sergey Lavrov, at the 62nd session of the United Nations General Assembly, is geared towards the achievement of those goals.

We attach great importance to the creation of mechanisms for interreligious dialogue under the auspices of UNESCO. An important milestone in that connection will be the forthcoming international meeting of religious leaders in Moscow with the participation of UNESCO Director-General Koichiro Matsuura on 22 July this year.

We see structures of this kind as a means of ensuring constant dialogue on the part of key international organizations with religious figures and of working to build peace, deal with the problems of globalization, maintain interreligious dialogue, combat intolerance and xenophobia, protect places of worship and holy sites and preserve national and cultural traditions.

Thank you for your attention.