



**OSCE, Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
FREEDOM OF RELIGION OR BELIEF**

22 June 2017

Session I

Church of Scientology: Human Rights Office

**Oral Statement and Recommendations
on Russia's religious discrimination and Recommendations**

Freedom of Religion or Believe, and its manifestations, **MUST NOT** be an empty right, even in Russia.

We call on the goodness of the Russian Orthodox Church leadership to assist the government and religious minorities to engage in a fruitful dialogue to reach a proper understanding of each other that allows full application of international religious freedom standards and cooperation to improve our modernday troubled societies.

Unlike an always increasing number of countries such as Spain, Portugal, Sweden, Canada, U.S, UK, Italy, Malta, and others, where proper application and promotion by States of religious freedom has been playing a key role and recognizing the Scientology religion and others, we face in

Russia important and relentless threats to this very right affecting negatively the most inner dignity and essence of individuals.

As of June 6, 2017, over 60 FSB officials and SWAT police raided the premises of the peaceful Church of Scientology religious group in St. Petersburg as well as the homes of four leaders of the religious group.

Under the pretext and biased use of the Extremism Law, 5 peaceful leaders of our religious group in Russia were arrested, interrogated and detained by the FSB. If convicted, these five individuals could face a six to ten-year prison term for their peaceful beliefs.

The use of this law against religions has been criticized by the UN Human Rights Committee, the Council of Europe Monitoring Committee and the Venice Commission amongst others, finding the law and its use against religions violated human rights and called on Russia to correct the law.

Specific Russian officials and authorities, rather than comply with its very constitution and unequivocal decisions by the Human Rights Court, have refused to register the St. Petersburg religious group as a legal entity.

Worse, has arrested and imprisoned religious leaders who successfully challenged the government's refusal to register the religious organization as a legal entity, on the grounds of operating their very rights "*without proper registration of a legal entity.*" This constitutes a grave violation of fundamental religious freedom of these individuals and their Church.

The campaign has been chillingly wide-ranging. Jehovah's Witnesses, Muslims, Evangelicals, Lutherans, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists, Presbyterians, Hindus, Scientologists, Buddhists and others have been targeted.

Law meant to protect individuals is being used as the basis for pretrial sentencing, imprisoning religious leaders of a peaceful and lawful religious group on the fallacious grounds that they were “dangerous extremists”, while in reality these religious people are leading thousands to efforts to create a sustainable improvement of society for all. They are part of the solution, not part of the problem.

International and legal standards mandate that religious minorities be treated fairly and without discrimination in the same way as other religions. Yet, Russia, through some of its officials, has contravened these standards by means of misapplication of the Extremism Law to censor religious materials, to arrest and detain believers for reading or disseminating Scriptures, to refuse to register religious groups, to prosecute and harass religious groups that are refused registration, and to liquidate and close down places of worship for targeted religious faiths. Such oppressive measures have no place in a democratic society.

Recommendations:

We call for OSCE members and civil society, before it increases the number of victims of the misuse of the law:

- A) to commit themselves and engage in diplomatic and high level dialogue with Russian Government Officials and Russian Orthodox Church aiming a proper interpretation of the law, that allows protection against extremisms and full application of religious freedom with specific focus on religious minorities.
- B) Propose a joint resolution/statement signed by every willing representatives of the states and civil society in support of the protection of the minorities in Russia.

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