

**Written Contribution of the Estonian Delegation to
High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
Astana, 29 -30 June 2010**

Session 2: Combating Anti- Semitism

Session 3: Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also focusing on intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions.

Religious Associations and Holocaust Education in Estonia

We would like to share our experience about religious associations in Estonia and about their cooperation with state authorities. There are altogether more than 70 different churches and congregations registered in Estonia. Though Estonians are predominantly of the Lutheran faith, there are other active congregations as well- Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Baptist ect. Estonia is also home to adherents of the Jewish faith and other religions such as Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism ect.

The relations between the State and religious associations are based on the principle of institutional separation. All religious associations registered according to law have the same rights and obligations and no religious association should get any preferential treatment from the State. There is no state church in Estonia. But this does not mean that there is no cooperation between the governmental institutions and religious associations in the areas of common interests, for instance social rehabilitation, social care, and restorations of sacral buildings with historical and/or cultural value, where it is also possible to get subsidies from the State. Otherwise the religious associations in Estonia are self-financing, and none of them gets direct financial support for their religious activities.

The only religious organization that gets annual subsidy directly from the State budget is the ecumenical non-profit organization Estonian Council of Churches. In 2002 the Estonian Government signed the Protocol of Common Interests with the Council. Currently there are 10 member churches of the Council.

The 1993 Churches and Congregations Act established the liberal politics of religion for the following years in Estonia. In 2002 new Act entered into force, according to which religious associations have to be registered in the Register of Religious Associations held by county courts. Religious associations are legal persons under private law. Since 2001 registered religious associations may apply for the right to their clergy to conduct marriages of civil validity and this possibility has been used actively.

There are four types of religious associations – churches, congregations, associations of congregations, and monasteries. The inclusion of legal definitions to the new Act has been criticized by the Estonian legal experts as unnecessary. In 2004 the mandatory use of these terms in the official name was considered a violation of freedom of religion and after interference by the Chancellor of Justice the law was amended in order to allow also the use of historical names.

The religious life in Estonia is a mosaic of various faiths and denominations and after regaining independence in 1991, spiritual life has been revived and is gaining more importance in Estonian's hearts.

On Holocaust education and cooperation with the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. The Holocaust is part of the Estonian school curriculum, dealt with in connection with the events of World War II. The subject is taught in grades five and nine, and in detail in the 12th grade modern history course. The film “Outcast” is shown on Holocaust Day in Estonian secondary schools since 2005. In January 2007, there was a presentation in Tallinn's Museum of Occupations of methodically prepared Holocaust teaching materials that has been produced in cooperation with Sweden's Living History Forum and the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research. The packet includes either Estonian or Russian-language printed materials as well as CD-ROM and DVD containing illustrative materials.

Estonia's cooperation with the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research was established in 2002, when Estonia applied to participate in its liaison projects. In 2005, we established a formal liaison relationship with the Task Force. The most noteworthy and effective result of our cooperation has been the production of Holocaust teaching materials that are based on the guidelines established by the Task Force. Estonia became a full member of the Task Force in December 2007, at the Plenary Meeting in Prague. Estonia has appointed its representatives to the Task Force's working groups. The Estonian delegations to the Task Force have consisted of the representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Culture, the Estonian Foundation for the Investigation of Crimes against Humanity, and the Council of the Jewish Community of Estonia. An essential precondition for fruitful international cooperation is broad-spectrum cooperation at home.