

**OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
Warsaw, 23 September – 4 October 2013**

**AYDIN SAFIKHANLI
Head of the Office of the Commissioner
for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

Working session 1: Tolerance and non-discrimination I:

Reply of the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the Delegation of the Republic of Armenia

In exercising the right of reply to the representative from the Armenian delegation we would like to note that Azerbaijan as a multinational and multi-confessional state supports the principles of “unity and diversity”. We are proud that there was not any case of intolerance and discrimination on the grounds of ethnic religion, language and cultural belonging at any stage of the century-old history of Azerbaijan. National minorities fully enjoy their rights and establish their national centers, associations and other agencies.

As a logical continuation of conducted reforms, National Program for Action (NPA) to Raise Effectiveness of the Protection of Human Rights and Freedoms in the Republic of Azerbaijan was approved with the Presidential Orders on December 27, 2011. The paragraph 2.2 of NPA enshrines continuation of the activities to preserve and develop the cultural heritage of ethnic minorities, the paragraph 4.11 enshrines prevention of crime that poses a serious threat to human rights and freedoms, such as aggression, terrorism, corruption, human trafficking, to continue activities both within the country and abroad (roundtables, seminars, conferences, etc.) on the theme of dialogue among cultures and religions and to strengthen religious tolerance. In the past period significant measures were taken by respective state bodies in this direction.

We would like to note that in the reviewed period one of the main directions of multi-branched activity of the Ombudsperson in protection of human rights and freedoms was fight against discrimination, elimination of such factors, and conduction of awareness-raising activities in this field. Under the provisions of Constitutional law on the Human Rights Commissioner, everyone living in the country has the right to appeal to the Azerbaijani Ombudsman irrespective of their race, nationality, religion, language and etc.

According to the Article 8.1 of the Constitutional Law on the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Republic of Azerbaijan the Ombudsman examines the complaints of the citizens of the Republic of Azerbaijan, foreigners and stateless persons, as well as legal entities related to the violation of their human rights.

The Azerbaijani Ombudsperson held awareness-raising campaigns on promotion of human rights and freedoms enshrined in national legislation, international conventions to which Azerbaijan is a party, as well as International Convention “On Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination”.

Numerous events were held with the purpose of provision of the rights and freedom of conscience of national minorities. At the events conducted in her own initiative the Commissioner made several constructive proposals for religious tolerance, moral education and mutual relations between people having various religious views.

The Azerbaijani Ombudsperson held a number of meetings with population in different regions of Azerbaijan where mainly national minorities live, training-seminars were organized for their legal enlightenment.

The Ombudsperson of Azerbaijan recently visited Guba region where Jewish national minorities vastly settled and also visited Khinalig village - the most remote settlement in this region, met local residents belonging to national minorities, got acquainted with their problems.

The Commissioner together with the Georgian Ombudsman and with the representatives of Georgian Embassy in the Republic of Azerbaijan held meetings and local executive powers in Gakhingiloy settlement where national minorities Georgians by origin do live and learned the situation with provision of their rights.

The Commissioner has close relations with the Council of Russian community in Azerbaijan, holds regular meetings with them. At these events the Commissioner noted that Russians were never exposed to national and religious discrimination for the period they lived in Azerbaijan, they actively participated in the social-political, scientific-cultural and economic life of the country preserving their ethnic identity, traditions, language and culture, the Council of Russian Community in Azerbaijan was succeeded with public activeness in civil society building process during the years of activity.

The Commissioner holds regular meetings with the representatives of the Tatar, Jews, Georgians, Russians and other communities in Azerbaijan in her own initiative or on their invitation.

The religious tolerance, mutual relations of persons having different religious views, improvement of intercultural dialog and interreligious cooperation, conduction of awareness-raising events at the educational institutions for explaining religious tolerance to children and the youth, introduction of tolerance policy at national and international levels, involvement of the whole society, state bodies, civil society, religious communities (Muslim, Christian, Jewish) to these processes and other topics were discussed at local and international events conducted with the initiative of the Azerbaijani Ombudsman.

Regional Centers of the Commissioner for Human Rights were opened in four regions of the Republic of Azerbaijan where national minorities live more compactly: Guba (covers 6 regions), Sheki (covers 6 regions), Jalilabad (covers 9 regions) and Ganja (covers 12 regions).

During her term in office the Azerbaijani Ombudsperson signed bilateral agreements on mutual collaboration with 11 Ombudsmen Institutions (Federal Ombudsman of Russia and regions, Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, Moldova and Poland). In these agreements along with mutual exchange of experience, directions of joint participation of nations living in both countries in solution of existing problems, as well as in provision of human rights and freedoms reflected in international conventions were enshrined.

Public hearings were held in each districts of the country in the initiative of the Commissioner with the purpose of monitoring of promotion and implementation of NPA. These events were attended by deputies elected from certain regions, heads of local executive powers, court and law enforcement bodies, municipalities, local NGOs, mass-media, District Electoral Committees and representatives of local communities of national minorities.

During the conduction of public hearings the Commissioner visited the places where national minorities live compactly in different regions of Azerbaijan, met with representatives of religious communities, and people, learned their daily living condition, provision of their rights, got acquainted with religious monuments and construction works on the spot.

We would like particularly to mention that as a result of Armenian aggression for more than 20 years, 5/1 part of our territory was occupied, more than one million Azerbaijanis including national minorities became refugees and IDPs. But it should be stressed that, ten thousands of Armenians live in Azerbaijan and their rights are equally ensured. Azerbaijani citizens belonging to Armenian nationality appealed to the Ombudsman Institution during its activity and those appeals were investigated according to the appropriate Law.

Thank You for Your attention!