

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 welcomes the holding of this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on a subject that, without exaggeration, worries millions of citizens in the OSCE participating States.

Although our agenda is couched in fairly general terms, we are confident that the participants in the meeting will address specific problems that arise in the fulfilment of commitments to safeguard freedom of conscience, religion and belief. We shall deal with the various aspects of this subject in another statement and shall distribute the text, which describes the nature of religious life in our country and the relations that Russian official bodies, in particular the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, maintain with the different religious associations in our multiconfessional State.

If I may, I will, however, now touch briefly on two problems which, in our opinion, are in need of further elaboration and discussion.

I should like to draw attention to Decision No. 4/03 (“Tolerance and non-discrimination”) adopted at the Maastricht Ministerial Council meeting in 2003, which emphasizes the importance of a continued and strengthened interfaith dialogue to promote greater tolerance, respect and mutual understanding. Although this provision has not yet been transformed into a direct obligation by States to promote such dialogue, I should like to hope that the logic of development in the OSCE itself will result in the consolidation of this provision in future by way of a formal commitment. As experts on freedom of religion and representatives of various confessions have gathered here today in Vienna, it would be interesting to hear their opinion on this matter.

We know that the future Kazakhstan Chairmanship intends to devote particular attention to these questions. If the OSCE participating States decide that the problem of interreligious dialogue deserves more intensive consideration, the Russian Federation would be willing to make a contribution to these efforts.

We have become accustomed to associating the problem of interreligious dialogue directly with questions of tolerance and non-discrimination. This is ultimately correct, but there is another aspect and another dimension to interreligious and interconfessional dialogue that are directly linked to the OSCE's mandate. I am talking here of the peace-building activities of the church and its role in post-conflict rehabilitation. We believe that this role of traditional confessions is somewhat underestimated. It would appear that the peace-building efforts of the church are in need of our firm but sensitive support but without any kind of political bias or interference.

In conclusion, I should like to turn to one further problem that gives rise to dispute and requires, as the very least, calm consideration. It concerns the relationship between traditional moral values and the conception of human rights. We believe that it is not really useful to put up a concrete "Berlin Wall" between these notions.

In our opinion, disregard and failure to take into account the concerns of hundreds of millions of believers when elaborating positions that expand the conception of human rights are indicative of a lack of belief in the maturity and sense of responsibility of a significant proportion of the citizens living in the OSCE area.

This subject was discussed three years ago in Strasbourg under the auspices of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. The participants in the round table – leading human rights activists and members of practically all European confessions – came to the conclusion that most conflicts were clearly contrived and that coexistence or even mutual enrichment were possible and necessary. Perhaps the time has come to think about conducting a discussion of this nature within the OSCE.