



**Delegation of Ukraine
to the OSCE**

**Statement by the Delegation of Ukraine
Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
“Freedom of Religion or Belief,
Fostering Mutual Respect and Understanding”
(Vienna, 2-3 July 2015)**

**Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Delegation of Ukraine would like to commend the OSCE Chairmanship and the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights for organizing this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, devoted to the important topic of the freedom of religion or belief.

The OSCE commitments on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief were first enshrined in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and further elaborated in many subsequent OSCE documents, including the 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration, in which participating States recognized that “greater efforts must be made to promote freedom of religion or belief and to combat intolerance and discrimination”. They constitute a comprehensive framework for participating States to ensure the respect for and promotion of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

Ukraine is fully committed to protecting and fostering the fundamental freedom of religion or belief, guaranteed by the Constitution of Ukraine, in compliance with the OSCE commitments and applicable international standards.

Ukraine is a multinational country, with over 130 nationalities of different religious backgrounds. The Government of Ukraine attaches great importance to the promotion of tolerance, mutual respect and understanding within the Ukrainian society. The overwhelming majority of religious communities in Ukraine describe harmonious inter-faith relations and conditions of non-discrimination allowing everyone to profess and practice, alone or in community with others, the religion or belief of his or her choice, as well as the right not to profess any religion.

Dear colleagues,

During Ukraine’s OSCE Chairmanship in 2013 my country significantly contributed in strengthening the implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments, including those on freedom of religion or belief. Our joint efforts with participating States and OSCE Institutions were crowned with the adoption of the MC Decision No. 3/13 on Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief, which, inter alia, underlines the importance of fostering a climate of mutual tolerance and respect between believers of different communities as well as between believers and non-believers, and to promote dialogue between religious or belief communities and governmental bodies. It also aims at preventing intolerance, violence and discrimination on the basis of religion or belief, including against Christians, Jews, Muslims and members of other religions, as well as against non-believers.

Distinguished participants,

Since last year parts of Ukraine's territory have been illegally occupied and annexed by a neighbouring state. Numerous independent reports, including by the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine and the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, testify that freedom of religion or belief is among many human rights and fundamental freedoms undergoing systemic violations in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol, illegally occupied by the Russian Federation, as well as in certain areas of Donbas, where Russia backs militants and continues to pursue its military aggression against Ukraine.

In Crimea, we remain alarmed over the repressions by the occupying authorities, which take the form of attacks on and the expulsion of the priests of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church and the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate, as well as the raids against Crimean Tatars' mosques and madrasas. Priests are forced to cooperate with the Russian Federal Security Service and to provide information about their parishioners. Those who refuse are threatened with prosecution on false charges of extremism. The mass-media controlled by the occupying authorities regularly spread the propaganda accusing followers of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of the Kyiv Patriarchate of fascism and hatred. Many Ukrainian priests were forced to leave Crimea.

The application of Russia's laws in the occupied Crimea, which contravene the UN GA resolution 68/262 "Territorial integrity of Ukraine" and has serious human rights implications, resulted in a total ban on religious activities of Ukrainian churches and religious organizations in Crimea and their subsequent elimination.

There have been increasing reports of violations of freedom of religion or belief in certain areas of Donbas, temporarily controlled by the Russia-backed militants. All faith traditions, except for the Orthodox Church of the Moscow Patriarchate, appear to be targeted by the militants through the persecution, abductions, unlawful deprivation of liberty, torture and ill-treatment and even killings of clergy members and believers, as well as the seizure of church property.

We strongly condemn these manifestations of religious-bias violence and discrimination, that should become a matter of serious concern for the international organizations and human rights NGOs, and we urge the Russian Federation to abide by the norms of international law and OSCE principles and commitments.

In this regard we particularly underline the need:

- to put an end to all forms of intimidation and harassment of religious communities;
- to properly investigate all incidents, thus enabling the protection of the freedom of religion or belief;
- to fully respect and protect freedom of religion or belief, including the right of religious communities to freely function without undue administrative or legislative hindrance, harassment or other restrictions.

Distinguished colleagues,

All those violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms constitute a serious threat to national security and peace in Ukraine and require an adequate international response. We encourage the OSCE Institutions to be more persistent in their efforts to ensure close monitoring of and reporting on the human rights situation in the occupied Crimea and certain areas of Donbas to help restore the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the affected regions.

Thank you.