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PC.DEL/322/24  
21 March 2024

ENGLISH  
Original: RUSSIAN

Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY  
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF  
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1466th MEETING OF THE  
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

21 March 2024

**On commitments regarding tolerance and non-discrimination:  
ensuring freedom of religion or belief**

Madam Chairperson,

The International Day to Combat Islamophobia, established through United Nations General Assembly resolution 76/254, was observed on 15 March. Russia was one of the co-sponsors of the recent General Assembly resolution on measures to combat Islamophobia. At our country's instigation, the United Nations General Assembly adopts every year a resolution on combating the glorification of Nazism, neo-Nazism and other practices that contribute to fuelling contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance. That thematic document, in which religious intolerance is also condemned most explicitly, traditionally elicits broad support from countries belonging to different world regions.

Madam Chairperson,

The Russian Federation is a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional State, where the preservation of intercultural and interreligious dialogue is of particular importance both within the country and in the international arena. We have over 190 nationalities living in our country; more than 20 million of its inhabitants profess Islam, which makes it the second-largest religion there.

Another significant date was commemorated a few days ago, namely the tenth anniversary of Crimea's reunification with Russia. A lot has been done in that Russian region for the followers of Islam, primarily Crimean Tatars, including the creation of places of worship. More than 30 mosques have been built in Crimea since 2014; the magnificent cathedral mosque in Simferopol, which can accommodate 4,000 worshippers, is very soon due to open its doors to all those wishing to enter. According to the Spiritual Administration of the Muslims of Crimea, around 400 mosques, other houses of worship and madrasas are operating on the peninsula. Every year, Muslim holidays are declared public holidays in the Republic of Crimea and a pilgrimage to Mecca is organized. Hundreds of inhabitants of Crimea take part in the annual hajj.

The Council on Interethnic and Interfaith Relations under the auspices of the Head of the Republic of Crimea continues to operate successfully. The Crimean Tatars' representative body is the Qurultay; in 2018, the Shura (Council) of Crimean Tatars was established as a special body tasked with working on how to enhance collaboration with regional authorities. The vast majority of Crimean Muslims point out that it was not until the peninsula was reincorporated into the Russian Federation that their pressing problems began to be addressed in practical terms, as they have on several occasions informed our Organization, too, in the context of the annual OSCE human dimension meetings.

We call upon the Western alliance countries to stop churning out false accusations against Russia that it is violating the rights of the Crimean Tatars. In January of this year, the International Court of Justice issued a final judgment on the proceedings against Russia instituted by Ukraine in January 2017 on the basis of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Court rejected Ukraine's claims and recognized that Russia's policies were in compliance with its obligations under the Convention. There is no discrimination against Crimean Tatars or Ukrainians in Crimea, just as there are no other problems with the protection of their identity and cultural traditions.

Madam Chairperson,

We have repeatedly spoken about how the rights of followers of the world religions have long been violated in the OSCE area. We have stressed the importance of stepping up concerted efforts on the basis of a comprehensive approach and paying equal attention to all traditional faiths. A relevant toolbox exists in our Organization, including the institution embodied by the three Personal Representatives dealing with these issues. Russia has consistently called for that institution to be preserved and for the visibility of such activities to be enhanced.

Unfortunately, going along with the approaches of the Western alliance countries, these officials, who have been engaged anew by each successive Chairmanship, are increasingly getting carried away with dubious non-consensus concepts to the detriment of their mandates. And this despite the fact that there is no shortage of problems in the OSCE area. In an overwhelming majority of instances this refers to long-standing deficiencies that manifest themselves in diverse ways, including the way in which certain countries pander to despicable stunts involving the burning of the Koran under the pretext of supposedly ensuring freedom of expression. We categorically condemn such attitudes.

In June 2023, a 400-page report was published in Germany. Prepared by a group of independent experts with the support of the Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, its title is "Anti-Muslim Sentiment: Germany Takes Stock" ("Muslimfeindlichkeit – Eine deutsche Bilanz"). Among other things, it is noted there that "anti-Muslim sentiment is no fringe phenomenon but, rather, is widespread among a large proportion of the German population and has remained at a consistently high level for many years." We would remind you that the preparation of this study was prompted by a racially motivated incident in the city of Hanau in 2020, where a right-wing extremist killed nine people from the migrant community.

According to a recent report by the Collective for Countering Islamophobia in Europe, a non-governmental organization, the number of Islamophobic incidents in France increased by 57 per cent in 2023, when 828 such cases were recorded. Between 2022 and 2023 the number of Islamophobic incidents at educational institutions increased by 80 per cent. These statistics are most unflattering for the authorities in Paris.

The figures relating to Canada are depressing. A report on Islamophobia was published in November 2023 by the Standing Senate Committee on Human Rights. According to its authors, "Islamophobia is present in Canadian society and in many of our institutions." It is also pointed out there that this

phenomenon constitutes “a daily reality for many Muslims”, that “one in four Canadians do not trust Muslims” and that “Canada leads the G7 in terms of targeted killings of Muslims motivated by Islamophobia.” Specific areas are cited where discrimination takes place, ranging from legislation on national security to violations of rights in the workplace. Muslim charities are subjected – for no good reason at all – to disproportionately rigorous audits by Canada’s tax agency. In other words, what we are dealing with in that OSCE participating State is institutional Islamophobia, as the compilers of the study also discuss.

The situation in the United States of America is most sad in this respect. In late January of this year, statistics were released by the Council on American-Islamic Relations, indicating that a total of 3,578 complaints about bias and discrimination had been submitted between October and December 2023. This represents a 178 per cent increase compared to the corresponding period in 2022. The existing data suggests that discrimination occurs most frequently in the fields of education and employment, but that it also manifests itself in hate crimes of various kinds.

Madam Chairperson,

The Orthodox faith is also at risk, for the neo-Nazi Kyiv regime and its Western handlers are not letting up in their attempts to prohibit by law the Ukrainian Orthodox Church. This is a direct and flagrant violation of Ukraine’s international obligations and commitments, including its OSCE commitments. We demand a substantive public reaction from Ms. Regina Polak to these outrageous violations.

Madam Chairperson,

This year marks ten years since the tasking by the OSCE Ministerial Council in Basel in 2014 with regard to drawing up and adopting declarations on combating discrimination against Christians, Muslims and followers of other religions. For Russia this will continue to be a matter of priority in the human dimension. We strongly urge the Maltese Chairmanship to take specific steps to implement the aforementioned tasking, which has been in the doldrums for years on account of the unconstructive stance of the European Union and its protégés. The dangerous trends towards a rise in religious intolerance that are unfolding throughout the OSCE area confirm the relevance of the decision that was adopted ten years ago.

Thank you for your attention.