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Delegation of the Russian Federation

**STATEMENT BY
MR. ALEKSANDR VOLGAREV, DEPUTY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF
THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION, AT THE 1502nd MEETING OF THE
OSCE PERMANENT COUNCIL**

12 December 2024

**In response to the address by the Personal Representatives of the
Chairperson-in-Office on tolerance and non-discrimination**

Madam Chairperson,

We have taken note of the reports by the Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office on combating intolerance and discrimination, Rabbi Andrew Baker, Ambassador Evren Akgün and Professor Regina Polak.

The Russian Federation has consistently called for the effectiveness and visibility of their efforts to be enhanced. This is particularly relevant in view of the deteriorating situation with regard to respect for religious rights and freedoms in the OSCE area, especially in countries “west of Vienna”. For many a year now, ideas of racial superiority have been gaining traction there, along with various forms of xenophobia, neo-Nazism, discrimination against Christians and Muslims, and anti-Semitism.

In particular, instances of intolerance towards members of traditional Christian denominations are multiplying. Independent human rights organizations are increasingly drawing attention to such phenomena. As the Executive Director of the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians in Europe has put it, “the peaceful expression of personal religious beliefs has become the potential end of a political career or employment, or even the beginning of a court case”.

Her words were seconded by a representative of the Commission of the [Catholic] Bishops’ Conferences of the European Union, who argued that modern liberal societies were increasingly hostile to traditional beliefs and were exerting social and legal pressure on Christians. These were, in effect, living in an environment of what might be termed “polite persecution”.

Unfortunately, such tendencies are not on the radar of Ms. Polak. In her report, instead of serious analysis of the reasons for the worsening situation in the field under her purview, she engaged in propagating dubious claims about the interrelationship between degradation of human rights and the “crisis of liberal democracy”. Moreover, it continues to be baffling that the Personal Representative’s work should be focused on LGBT and gender issues while clearly ignoring the topic of Christianophobia.

Yet, according to data from relevant non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the number of hate crimes targeting Christians in Europe increased by 226 per cent in 2023 to reach a total of 2,444, compared with 749 incidents in 2022. The top spot on the “medallists’ podium” goes to France, where around 1,000 criminal acts occurred, followed by the United Kingdom with 702 incidents and Germany, where 277 attacks were recorded along with over 2,000 cases of property damage to Christian places of worship.

Significantly, for the inhabitants of the United Kingdom it is becoming more and more dangerous to openly display their religious affiliation. For example, the findings of a recent survey by Voice for Justice, a British NGO, indicate that more than half of the country’s Christians (and around 60 per cent among young Christians) have endured manifestations of Christianophobia. This refers to various forms of discrimination, all the way down to dismissal from one’s job. Moreover, only 36 per cent of the young people surveyed felt that they could speak freely about their Christian world view. The authors of the survey emphasize that “Christianity lies at the foundation of British society, underpinning our tolerance and acceptance of diversity”, but that their study “shows Christians in the UK, both in the workplace and socially, are increasingly subjected to discrimination and marginalisation”.

Manifestations of religious intolerance towards Jews are surging. In France, again, the number of manifestations of anti-Semitic violence increased in 2023 by 1,000 per cent over 2022 according to the country’s Ministry of the Interior. Since 7 October 2023, some 25 per cent of the Jewish population in the Fifth Republic have reported falling victim to anti-Semitic incidents. These are mainly young people below the age of 25. A steady rise in Islamophobia has also been observed in that OSCE participating State. To such an extent that, over the past few years, as reported by prominent media outlets in the country, there has been a sharp increase in the number of highly qualified specialists who have left or intend to leave France. We are talking here about tens of thousands of people with a good education, with university degrees. Survey respondents point out that, despite having been born in France or emigrated there in their early childhood years, they constantly encounter such attitudes that make them feel that “our home is not here; this country will never accept us.”

In Germany, another country we have already mentioned, there has been a dramatic surge in incidents reflecting anti-Semitic hatred against the backdrop of the escalating situation in the Middle East. According to recent data from Germany’s Federal Ministry of the Interior and Community, more than 3,300 anti-Semitic criminal offences were recorded in the country between January and September 2024. That is twice the figure for the corresponding period in 2023. In 1,500 cases, the offences in question were categorized as being linked to the Middle East conflict. Of these, 67 per cent were perpetrated on the grounds of “foreign extremist ideology”, 19 per cent were motivated by religion, 6 per cent were attributed to right-wing extremists and 3 per cent to left-wing extremists. They most frequently involved incitement to hatred (554 incidents), the dissemination of propaganda for prohibited organizations (363 incidents) and damage to property (329 incidents). Bodily injury was caused in 24 instances and there were two attempted murders. The German police believe that there is a considerable number of unreported incidents.

The situation in the United States of America is far from satisfactory either. According to data from the Anti-Defamation League, an NGO, the threat level faced by Jews has increased threefold since the start of the events in the Gaza Strip. There were more than 10,000 anti-Semitic incidents between 7 October 2023 and September 2024, which is 3,325 incidents more than during the same period a year before. At the same time, intolerance towards Muslims is intensifying. Experts at the Council on American-Islamic Relations have presented figures indicating that in 2023 they received 8,061 complaints about related offences, which is the highest number recorded in all the 28 years that they have been collecting such information.

Madam Chairperson,

In view of all this, it becomes increasingly important to implement the tasking from the 2014 OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Basel with regard to the drafting of declarations on countering Christianophobia and Islamophobia. As a significant step we would point to the adoption, at the Ministerial Council meeting in Valletta a week ago, of a joint statement by the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Republic of Belarus, Hungary, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Russian Federation, the Republic of Tajikistan and the Republic of Uzbekistan on enhancing efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions. We hope that the aforementioned statement will provide the impetus for carrying on with efforts in this important area. By the way, it is surprising, though, that those speaking today could find no occasion for mentioning the adoption of such a statement.

Madam Chairperson,

We have repeatedly drawn attention to the deteriorating situation in the religious sphere in Ukraine, where over many years the Kyiv regime has been consistently taking measures aimed at curtailing the rights of believers and eradicating canonical Orthodoxy.

A veritable campaign of terror has been unleashed in recent years against the clergy and parishioners of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). Religious buildings and other facilities of the canonical Church are subjected to constant searches by the authorities in Kyiv. The Security Service of Ukraine has been churning out criminal cases by the thousands against “disloyal” UOC clergy and grossly interfering in religious life to look for evidence of some sort of “anti-Ukrainian activities”.

Hundreds of churches belonging to the canonical UOC have been seized by pseudo-Orthodox schismatics with the active support of the intelligence services and the local authorities. Clergy and laypeople – both men and women – have suffered physical violence. The situation in the Lviv region is of particular concern. The head of that region, Maksym Kozytskyi, “proudly” announced recently that the UOC had, to all intents and purposes, ceased to exist there: over the past three years, as a result of the aforementioned actions, 27 Orthodox communities had joined the so-called Orthodox Church of Ukraine, which was created in 2018 by the political leaders of the Kyiv regime. An additional 27 parishes had, by their own decision allegedly, ceased to operate.

The wave of repressions against canonical Orthodoxy culminated with the entry into force, on 23 September this year, of the so-called Act on Protection of the Constitutional Order in Regard to the Activities of Religious Organizations, which explicitly bans the UOC. Significantly, its illegal nature is being emphasized even by Ukrainian NGOs. In particular, experts from the Centre for the Study of the Rule of Law and Religion have drawn attention to the fact that international human rights standards prohibit the elimination of religious organizations merely on the basis of their canonical ties. A ban is possible only in the event of proven illegal behaviour on the part of an organization. In their opinion, the UOC’s elimination would be a “disproportionate measure”.

Madam Chairperson,

We are obliged to note that our direct appeals to Ms. Polak regarding the woeful situation of Ukrainian Orthodoxy have gone unanswered, as have the repeated discussions of this topic here at the Permanent Council. Unfortunately, Ms. Polak refuses to take a stand against the Kyiv authorities’ criminal actions, which are treading underfoot the religious rights of their own population. Instead, she continues to relay mendacious Russophobic talking points and to disseminate disingenuous expert assessments. We stress

once more that we regard Ms. Polak's silence as tantamount to encouraging the Zelenskyy regime's unlawful acts and as yet another manifestation of double standards on human rights issues.

Madam Chairperson,

The problems raised today are clear evidence of the exacerbation of dangerous tendencies as regards the protection of religious rights and freedoms in the OSCE area. We are counting on a meaningful response from the new leadership of our Organization's specialized institutions. We once again call upon the Personal Representatives to fulfil their duties in a professional manner, to be guided by consensus concepts adopted by all the participating States and to refrain from pursuing one-sided and opportunistic approaches.

Thank you for your attention.