

Reply by the Republic of Azerbaijan

26 September 2013

Working Session 7:

Freedom of Religion or belief

We would like to exercise the right of reply concerning the reference made by the representative of the Jehovah's Witnesses

First of all we would like to underline that religious associations or communities which were not able to pass the re-registration after the amendments were made to the Law on Freedom of Religious Belief are still functioning with their previous registration certificate, without any obstacle.

At the same time, we would like to emphasize that according to statistics after the amendments were made to the abovementioned Law – from 2009 till 2013 i.e. for last four years more religious communities were registered rather than from 2001 till September 2009.

Regarding the registration of Jehovah's Witnesses, first of all we would like to clarify that the registration of the Community of Jehovah Witnesses is denied because of the fact that they didn't submit all required documents in accordance with the appropriate Law.

Regarding the other point which was concerning the confiscation of religious literature and problems importing them we firstly want to underline that in accordance with the abovementioned Law the State Committee on Work with Religious Associations provides expertise of religious literature and in accordance with the Law the literature that promotes religious hatred, religious intolerance and other the same kind of content is not permitted to be imported to the country. Besides, we would like to stress is that the Community of Jehovah's Witnesses has imported to my country books in tens of different titles and almost all of them were allowed to enter the country.

Regarding the law on alternative military service, once more Azerbaijan recognizes its obligation taken when entering the Council of Europe. We believe alternative military service would help strengthen social work in Azerbaijan and we would like to benefit from its advantages. But, unfortunately, it is temporarily impossible due to the fact that one fifth of our territories remain under the occupation of Armenia and the mentioned OSCE participating state shows no intention of withdrawing its troops peacefully from our lands.

Thank you!