

Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan**Working Session 14***3 October, 2012***Tolerance and non-discrimination II: Review of the implementation of commitments on promotion of mutual respect and understanding:**

- Prevention and responses to hate crimes in the OSCE area,
- Combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also focusing on intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions,
- Combating anti-Semitism,
- Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is a multinational and multi-religious country. The national policy of the country is defined on the principles of tolerance and coexistence of various nationalities, ethnic groups and religious minorities.

Regardless, the fact that the majority of Azerbaijani population are Muslims, there is no discrimination as to religion or belief. Nowadays more than one thousand mosques, eleven churches, six synagogues and other religious temples are functioning in Azerbaijan without any obstacles.

Despite the difficulties being experienced by Azerbaijan, due to the unresolved armed conflict that continues for about 20 years with neighboring Armenia, which occupies 20 percent of the Azerbaijani territory and the presence of about one million refugees and forcibly displaced persons, the Government of Azerbaijan continues to pursue a consistent policy towards protection of the rights of all minorities living in the country.

According to the article 25 of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the state ensures equality of rights and freedom of everybody irrespective of his race, nationality, religion, language, sex, background, state of property, faith, work position, membership to political parties, trade unions and other public institutions.

At the same time, Azerbaijan has joined to 8 of 9 core international treaties, including International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and UNESCO Convention on the Promotion and Protection of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

Besides, the international instruments special measures are stipulated against racial or other types of discrimination within the national law system. Articles 103, 104, 111, 283 of Criminal Code and the Law on Freedom of Religious Faith, the Law on Right of the Child, the Law on Political Parties, the Law on Education and etc. include provisions against discrimination. The National Security Conception of the Republic of Azerbaijan provides for a number of

important provisions in the field of safeguarding national and religious tolerance, i.e. in accordance with the sub-paragraph 4.3.2 of the mentioned Conception, protection and development of national and religious tolerance established in the country is determined as one of the major commitments of the state.

At the same time, in accordance with the National Action Plan for Human Rights special measures are taken for the strengthening of intercultural dialogue and interfaith cooperation, protection and further development of cultural heritage of ethnic minorities in different regions of Azerbaijan.

In this regard, Azerbaijan attaches great attention to awareness raising activities among population. For recent year the State Committee on Work with Religious Organizations held more than 30 seminar-trainings on cultural and religious diversity, including inter-religious dialogue in various regions of the country. Respectfully, Azerbaijan attaches particular importance to human rights education, the Ministry of Education regularly organizes events oriented to strengthening respect to people representing different cultures, ethnicities and religions. Trainings have been conducted for teaching staff on “National minorities”, “Respect to people representing different cultures, races, nationalities, languages and religions” and others.

Besides, Azerbaijan pays great attention to promotion of best examples of religious tolerance and inter-religious dialogue. In this regard, Azerbaijan initiated “Baku Process” of cross cultural dialogue, launched in 2008. The special feature of this process is that it brings together people of different origins from different cultures through programs and projects in the field of culture and dialogue. Various important events took place within the framework of this process. As a continuation of this project Azerbaijan invited more than ten states from Council of Europe to participate at the Sixth Conference of Ministers of Culture of Islamic countries held in Baku in 2009. Another important event - new project “Dialogue of Culture Capitals” was launched by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism in 2010 within this process. At the same time, in April 2011 Baku hosted World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue, attended by 500 participants from all over the world. We plan to organize the World Forum on Intercultural Dialogue every two years.