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## **Human Rights Without Frontiers supports freedom of religion at the OSCE/ODIHR in Warsaw**

**HRWF (29.09.2009) - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - Today, Human Rights Without Frontiers made a statement about mass-scale violations of religious freedom in Central Asia and in Nagorno-Karabakh at the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting of the OSCE/ ODIHR in Warsaw. Here is the text of the presentation.**

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** is concerned about the situation of religious freedom in most of the countries of Central Asia and South Caucasus, and wants to address this issue at this meeting of the OSCE/ODIHR as there is no other appropriate regional mechanism to do it. Due to time constraints, we will focus on three countries: **Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan**, as well as a disputed territory, **Nagorno-Karabakh**.

### **Recommendations to the authorities of Kazakhstan**

**Considering** that the new law on religion is too vague concerning the rights and obligations of the various religious organizations and missionary activities;

**Considering** that the grounds on which the charter of a religious organization applying for registration can be rejected by the authorities are not specified;

**Considering** that a charter rejection leads to the prohibition of any activity by the applicant group;

**Considering** that the authorities deny the freedom of assembly to any group of believers that has not been registered as a religious association;

**Considering** that a number of peaceful religious groups do not want to be registered on theological grounds or have been banned by a court decision just for failing to fulfil some administrative obligations;

**Considering** the repeated arrests and condemnations to exorbitant fines of ordinary members of Baptists congregations hosting informal religious meetings in their homes;

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the authorities of Kazakhstan to follow the recommendations of the Kazakh Human Rights Ombudperson's Office, the OSCE Advisory Panel of Experts, the Kazakh Helsinki Committee and Kazakh religious leaders

- by de-criminalizing the non-registration of religious groups;
- by stopping judicial proceedings against non-registered religious communities, peaceful meetings of believers in private and in public, and missionary activity;
- by using the revision of the Code of Administrative Offences to remove articles 374-1 and 375 of the current code which provide for fines amounting to 100 times and 50 times the minimum monthly wage, respectively for leading or participating in the activity of an unregistered religious group.

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### **Recommendations to the authorities of Tajikistan**

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**Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the authorities of Tajikistan

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**To revise the Law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations" No 489 of 26 March 2009** so as to remove the limitations to religious freedom that are incompatible with international standards and in particular

- by reducing the excessive power of the state to control the activities of religious associations;
- by clarifying the rights and obligations of the various types of religious associations;
- by clarifying the legislation concerning the visas to foreign missionaries;

**To revise the Law "On the Fight With Extremism", No 69 of 8 December 2003**

- by ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law, while pursuing the legitimate goal of combating terrorism to protect their nationals and others against terrorist attacks and of bringing the perpetrators to justice;
- by dropping the provision saying "the propagandizing of exclusiveness, supremacy or the weakness of citizens on the basis of their relation to religion, social, racial, national, religious or linguistic belonging" as it has been misused to ban religious groups which do not use or advocate violence;

**To lift the ban on the religious associations of Jehovah's Witnesses and several Protestant communities;**

**To provide a new place of worship to the Protestant Church Nani Hayat** as their church building has been destroyed without any financial compensation on the alleged grounds of city planning;

**To lift the ban on the import of religious publications by Jehovah's Witnesses** as they are imported without any obstacle by all the OSCE member states.

### **Recommendations to the authorities of Uzbekistan**

**Considering** the severe restrictions to the right of association;

**Considering** the repeated refusals to register Protestant and Jehovah's Witnesses' congregations;

**Considering** the ban on missionary activity and evangelism;

**Considering** the severe restrictions to the import of religious literature in the Uzbek language;

**Considering** the heavy fines provided by the Administrative Code (sometimes 100 times the monthly salary);

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** considers Uzbekistan seriously falls short of its OSCE commitments and therefore recommends

- to revise the 1998 Religion Law to make it compatible with international standards;
- to guarantee full freedom of association and of assembly;
- to decriminalize activities of unregistered religious organizations;
- to register religious communities which do not advocate violence and to put an end to the de-registration of peaceful religious groups;
- to guarantee freedom of worship and freedom of religious education, including in family and in private;
- to allow Uzbek and foreign religious communities to operate charitable activities;
- to guarantee the right to publish and import religious material which does not contain hate speech and does not disturb public order or threaten security;
- to guarantee the right to change one's religion and to prosecute those who obstruct it;
- to lift the ban on the right to propagate one's faith.

### **Recommendations to the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh**

- **Considering** that the Parliament of Nagorno-Karabakh adopted a new law obliging religious denominations in their territory to apply for registration;
- **Considering** that an arbitrary and unfounded refusal to grant Jehovah's Witnesses state registration was issued on August 3, 2009, and has already had a detrimental effect on the daily lives of more than 500 Jehovah's Witnesses and their supporters in Nagorno-Karabakh;
- **Considering** that the Chief of the Department for National Minorities and Religious Affairs of Nagorno-Karabakh Government Staff, Mr. A. Sargsyan, has been quoted in the media as having said that Jehovah's Witnesses are "effectively banned";
- **Considering** that Jehovah's Witnesses from Nagorno-Karabakh have to go to Armenia to join larger gatherings with fellow-believers and that upon their returning from such religious conventions, border patrols regularly stop and search their vehicles, confiscate all religious literature in their possession for personal use;

**Human Rights Without Frontiers** urges the authorities of Nagorno-Karabakh

- - to limit the refusal of registration to the sole religious movements which disturb public order and practice or advocate violence;
    - to open a dialogue with religious groups applying for registration under the auspices of the OSCE;
    - to stop confiscating religious literature.
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# Why did the Vatican veto the OSCE's guidelines on teaching religion?

By Willy Fautré (\*)

Published in NEW EUROPE (Brussels)

26 July 2009

HRWF (10.07.2009) - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) – Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools drafted by a wide range of international experts of the **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe[i]** (**OSCE**) were incomprehensibly rejected by one of its 56 member states: the Holy See. This stalemate created by a state of a few square kilometers was unofficially discussed behind the scenes of the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of Religion or Belief which was held in Vienna from 8 to 10 July.

From the time the Spanish Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE first initiated the idea of developing guiding principles on teaching about religion, there was consensus that there would be symbolic resonances if the project could be launched in Toledo, a Spanish city laden with relevant history. For that reason, the Advisory Council of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief of the OSCE/ODIHR[ii] met with a number of leading experts in Toledo in March 2007 to commence work on the project. Why Toledo and not another "more prestigious" place like Paris or London? Because in that Spanish city stands the 13th-century Roman Catholic church of San Roman which was once a Visigothic[iii] Christian church and then a mosque. This symbolic choice in favor of Toledo suggests that our present is the result of a complex layering of civilizations and that it is vital to grasp the confluence rather than the clash of civilizations.

Fourteen members of the Advisory Council of Experts, four participating members of the ODIHR Panel of Experts, two UN experts, one expert of the Council of Europe and fifteen external experts contributed to this breaking through project. Interviewed by me for this article, the Permanent Representative of the Holy See to the OSCE, Mgr Michael W. Banach, declared "This is a complex issue that cannot be explained in a few minutes but we have some objections concerning the methodology and the contents." Mgr Banach first regretted that as a participating State the Holy See had not been consulted during the drafting process of the Toledo Guidelines. He then stressed that the main areas of concerns of the Holy See were: the danger that teaching about religions may replace the teaching of religions in some countries; the risk that religions are portrayed negatively, the non-differentiated treatment of historical religions with regard to small religious and belief groups by the OSCE/ODIHR in general, and parental rights in the religious education of their children.

## ***Sounds of silence***

I conducted discussions with a number of experts involved in the Toledo project and asked them to react to the objections of the Holy See. It appears from these contacts that there was no obligation to consult the 56 participating States during the drafting process but that the Holy See was not discriminated against. On the contrary: fifty percent of the experts were Catholic academics who know the sensitive issues of the Catholic Church and they never objected to the contents of the Toledo Guiding Principles at any stage of the drafting process. The dissent expressed through diplomatic channels by the Holy See was addressed during two separate meetings between Advisory Panel members and representatives of the Holy See. Several months ago, ambassador Janez Lenarcic (Slovenia), director of ODIHR, sent a letter to the Holy See to try to clarify the situation but never received an answer. The objections and the silence of the decision-makers of the Holy See are incomprehensible to the numerous experts who devoted so

much time and energy to a project meant to fight prejudices, to promote tolerance and respect between religious and belief communities. "There was never any anti-Catholic sentiment in the drafting committee of the Toledo principles. We have always been and we still are open to a meaningful dialogue with the decision-makers of the Holy See but there is no response," said one expert. And another one said "We have always been neutral in our work. The Toledo principles do not advocate the replacement of religious classes by classes about religions and beliefs.

More disreputable reasons and some fears may however be part of a hidden agenda of the Church: a form of resistance to the secularization process, the gradual loss of control on religious education in public schools, the perceived risk of instrumentalization of the Toledo principles by the Spanish Socialist government in its conflicting relations with the Catholic Church; the risk for the Catholic Church to be presented not only positively but also negatively (such as priests' sexual abuses of children), and so on.

It seems there is no unanimity against the Toledo principles at the Holy See and that some of its high-level representatives are favorable to them. Therefore, the right questions to be asked and solved behind the reasons of the Holy See's veto might be "Who in the Holy See vetoes the Toledo guidelines?" and is the Pope aware of what is at stake in this stalemate?

Maybe the time has come for muffled diplomacy to make room for public debate.

**(\* Author: Willy Fautré, director of Human Rights Without Frontiers International (Brussels))**

[i]The OSCE is the world's largest regional security organization whose 56 participating States span the geographical area from Vancouver to Vladivostok. The Organization has its roots in the 1973 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) held in Helsinki between the representatives of 35 states the Western World, the Soviet Union and its satellites. The Helsinki process led to the Helsinki Final Act signed in 1975 by the then 35 participating States. The ceremony was opened by Holy See's diplomat Cardinal Agostino Casaroli who was chairman of the conference.

[ii] ODIHR is the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE's main institution to assist participating States "to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to abide by the rule of law, to promote principles of democracy and (...) to build, strengthen and protect democratic institutions, as well as promote tolerance through society" (1992 Helsinki Document).

[iii] The Visigoths were the « Barbarian » tribe that sacked Rome in 410 C.E. before conquering France and Spain. Looking back even further, they had been a tribe of farmers living along the Danube in what is now Romania. Their ancestors in turn came from the pagan Gothic tribes of Scandinavia.

**Note of the author:** The original title of the article submitted to NEW EUROPE was "Why did the Holy See Veto the OSCE Guidelines on Teaching about Religions in Public Schools?"

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## **Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of Religion or Belief:**

### **Intervention by the Permanent Delegation of Sweden**

Mr/Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Sweden would like to thank the Greek Chairmanship for organizing this Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting together with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The topic at hand – Freedom of religion or belief – is not only a very important human right and fundamental freedom in itself but also closely linked to other relevant fundamental freedoms such as the freedoms of expression, assembly and association.

That everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion is, in Sweden, held to be a self-evident truth. It has not however, always been like that. Mass emigration in the 19th Century bears witness to the trauma of not being allowed to belong to the congregation of one's choice.

In today's democratic Sweden, freedom of religion is given absolute protection by the Constitution and cannot be restricted. Freedom of religion includes the freedom to hold certain religious beliefs, to practice a religion or to practice no religion. The manifestation of the freedom of religion, for example through disseminating information, taking part in religious preaching or forming and participating in religious associations, is protected by other human rights and fundamental freedoms such as the right to freedom of expression and assembly.

The exercise of these rights may be subject only to such restrictions as are prescribed by law and are consistent with international standards.

Other relevant legal provisions can be found in, for example the Criminal Code, according to which it is a criminal offence to interfere or attempt to prevent public worship, public practice, marriage, funeral and similar duty. Nevertheless, the exercise of such religious practices or rites may be limited by law to protect the human rights and freedoms of others.

Furthermore a criminal act is not protected just because it has religious motives. It is, however, fundamental that no limitation is discriminatory and singles out particular religions or beliefs.

Mr/Madam Chairperson,

My government is fully committed to ensure that Sweden meets the demands of a multicultural society, where everyone regardless of gender, sexual orientation, disability, ethnic, linguistic or religious affiliation is guaranteed equal value, and where her dignity and freedom is not violated. In practice this is an everyday struggle, but through a democratic system which assumes that we are different and allows us to be so, we continue to work to achieve this aim.

My government is further committed, together with partners in the EU and OSCE, to defend the right to freedom of religion or belief internationally, be it by reacting against violations, supporting human rights defenders or working together to enhance the protection of the right worldwide.

During the last few years the debate regarding freedom of religion has intensified - with farreaching political and economic consequences - including tragic acts of violence and deplorable harassment of individuals. This clearly demonstrates the link between respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms on the one hand and security on the other. Once again we are reminded of the crucial need for a comprehensive security agenda.

Mr/Madam Chairperson,

Dialogue across national, regional or religious borders is essential to promote mutual understanding and respect. Only through dialogue can there be tolerance between various believers and non-believers. In this regard, the role of civil society cannot be stressed enough. Religious communities all over the OSCE region play an important part in civil society and their representatives are in many cases also active human rights defenders. At the same time - even in the OSCE-region - it still happens that governments oppress civil society and that those expressing criticism or their beliefs are silenced. This can never be accepted.

The link between freedom of religion or belief and freedom of expression should be particularly highlighted. You cannot enjoy freedom of religion or belief without the fundamental freedom to receive information or express an opinion. Governments' restrictions of the internet is an example of unacceptable violations of the freedom of expression and also, in effect, a means to restrict people's possibility to exercise their freedom of religion or belief.

Mr/Madam Chairperson,

Let me conclude by reiterating Sweden's appreciation for the work done by the ODIHR and its Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion and Belief. We have taken particular note of the useful Toledo Principles on religious education as well as other high quality recommendations provided during the years. We encourage all participating States to make use of the assistance and recommendations provided by ODIHR and the Advisory Panel. Today I would particularly like to express my appreciation for the valuable recommendations presented by the speaker from the Civil Society Roundtable, and reiterate my hope that the upcoming meeting will provide for interesting discussions.

Thank you.

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## **OSCE meeting on freedom of religion or belief in Vienna**

OSCE (09.07.2009) / HRWF (10.07.2009) - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - A special OSCE meeting on freedom of religion or belief opened today with calls for increased efforts by participating States to put into practice relevant commitments.

OSCE participating States have agreed to one of the most extensive sets of freedom of religion or belief standards, but governments are not doing enough to implement these commitments and let themselves be guided by them in tackling challenges, participants at the meeting were told.

"There can be no doubt that the promotion of freedom of religion or belief offers the best remedy to extremism, and adds an important safeguard to our collective security," said Ambassador Janez Lenarcic, the director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which organized the meeting.

But he also stressed that religious commitment must not conflict with the respect for the rule of law: "Having obtained the status of a religious or belief community is not a licence for disregarding the law."

The representative of the Greek OSCE Chairmanship, Ambassador Nikolaos Kalantzianos, said there was a clear need for all participating States to make conscious efforts in this area and remain committed to upholding the OSCE's high standards.

Ombretta Fumagalli Carulli, a Professor at the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Italy, said in her keynote speech that freedom of religion or belief is still violated daily in the OSCE region.

"Violations of the freedom of religion or belief ... occur predominantly where there are recurring episodes of violation of several human rights. In these countries religious freedom constitutes a sort of litmus paper to test the respect of all other human rights," she said.

But Carulli also emphasized that well established democracies are not exempt from challenges to the freedom of religion or belief: "For example, the false idea is more and more widespread that religions are a negative fact, a fact that should be fought against, instead of being an element of progress and well-being of our societies."

In advance of the meeting, some 100 civil society representatives from across the OSCE region called on participating States to "actively create an atmosphere in the public space within which freedom of religion or belief can best flourish and in which religious and belief communities can engage in full and fruitful dialogue".

### **Recommendations by Civil Society Representatives**

From 2006 onwards, the OSCE human dimension events related to tolerance and non-discrimination have been preceded by civil society meetings where participants formulated recommendations to the OSCE participating States and to the OSCE institutions. These meetings have given civil society the opportunity to discuss the current issues and priorities related to the topics of the OSCE conferences, to inform governments of the results of their activities, to share best practices and to engage in coalitions and networks across the region. Since the meetings have resulted in pertinent and constructive recommendations, and since the OSCE has committed to strengthen the involvement of civil society at policy level, the Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of Religion or Belief was also preceded by a Roundtable for civil society.

The side event was attended by around 100 representatives of non-governmental organizations.

### **Recommendations generated by participants during the Roundtable can be found below:**

1. Freedom of religion or belief should be mainstreamed in the work of ODIHR;
  2. Participating States are encouraged to implement existing commitments on freedom of religion or belief according to international human rights standards. Participating States are encouraged to make use of the assistance available from ODIHR;
  3. The rule of law should be recognized as an essential prerequisite for full and proper enjoyment of freedom of religion or belief;
  4. Participating States are encouraged to actively create an atmosphere in the public space within which freedom of religion or belief can best flourish and in which religious and belief communities can engage in full and fruitful dialogue. This space should be open to all, and the public media can play an important role in the creation of this space.
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# **OSCE meeting on freedom of religion or belief in Vienna: Statement by the Council of Europe**

***By Michael Head, Member of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)***

## **I. Introduction**

First, I would like to thank you for giving ECRI the opportunity to participate in this meeting. As you are aware, ECRI, of which I am a member since 1996 and former Chair, is an independent human-rights monitoring mechanism set up by the Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Council of Europe at the Vienna Summit on 9 October 1993. It is specialised in the fight against racism, xenophobia, antisemitism and intolerance.

ECRI's action covers all measures aimed at combating violence, discrimination and prejudice faced by persons or groups of persons on grounds of "race", colour, language, nationality, national or ethnic origin and, most importantly for today's meeting, religion (including real or perceived lack of religious belief).

Indeed, ECRI considers that religious intolerance is a form of racism. In this respect its approach differs from that of the European Union, which in the past and in its recent legislative initiative appears to consider that racial and religious discrimination do not always call for the same treatment.

In my short presentation, I will discuss the issues facing ECRI in the field of religious freedom from the point of view of intolerance and discrimination. Although the two aspects are interconnected, one could argue that intolerance is singling out the followers of a religion for attack, physical or verbal, direct or indirect, while discrimination is not according followers of a religion the rights and opportunities granted to others.

## **II. Intolerance**

While monitoring the situation in various Council of Europe Member States, ECRI has taken issue with various forms of intolerance: harassment by the police and local authorities vis-à-vis, among others, "non-traditional" groups; violence against persons and properties perpetrated by non-state actors; and inflammatory speech by extremist politicians and media.

ECRI has also commented on the spreading of stereotypes and prejudice (on, for example, the limited possibilities of some religious groups to integrate); and even the contribution to the negative climate of the exploitation by mainstream politicians of issues such as forced marriages and female genital mutilation. In this connection, it is worth recalling ECRI's 2005 declaration on the use of racist, antisemitic and xenophobic elements in political discourse.

ECRI takes the position that the authorities should not only refrain from interfering; they have positive duties to protect physically members of religious groups; criminalise certain intentional acts; provide in their legislation for the dissolution of certain organisations or for the withdrawal of public financing; enforce the relevant legislation; collect statistics on its application; and educate school children and the general public through awareness-raising activities. For ECRI there is no real dilemma between protecting freedom of speech and the fight against religious intolerance. There are cases where the demands of the latter will take precedence over the former. It should be noted in this

respect that the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Cybercrime Convention takes to some extent the same position.

To conclude on intolerance, ECRI has issued a General Policy Recommendation on *combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims* and one on *the fight against antisemitism*. The first, which quite significantly was adopted before 11 September 2001, warns against messages of threat or hostility conveyed by the media; for example when they report on the arrests of Muslims but not on their acquittals. The second stresses the need to promote learning about Jewish history and the Shoah including the developments leading to it. ECRI is acutely aware of the effects of international events in these two contexts. However, it is against seeing antisemitism and Islamophobia as imported conflicts and a problem between groups. For ECRI, these are problems of the society as a whole.

### **III. Discrimination**

I will now turn to religious discrimination, which ECRI has come across in its monitoring work in many forms. The legislation on *registration of religious groups* is, for example, wrongly applied: the authorities either refuse to register some groups or grant them inferior status. In so far as *suitable premises* are concerned, Muslims encounter difficulties in obtaining permission for building mosques; cemeteries are not available for some communities. States also fail to ensure equality when *returning religious property* confiscated during the communist period.

Another issue is *religious instruction*. For ECRI, in public-sector schools it should be optional; whenever it is made compulsory, States should ensure that it reflects the religious diversity of the society pupils live in. ECRI's country-by-country recommendations in this respect inevitably reflect the diversity of the situations in Member States: for example, ECRI has called for the survival of minority schools but also warned against *de facto* religious segregation. Finally, in its General Policy Recommendation on *combating racism and racial discrimination in and through school education*, ECRI has highlighted the need for an instruction which "complies with the scientific neutrality essential in any educational approach".

Generally speaking, religious discrimination in all these fields is often associated with the influence of a majority church in state and social affairs.

Discrimination by the police in the field of stops and searches and profiling is also of serious concern to ECRI, which has also adopted General Policy Recommendations on *combating racism while fighting terrorism* and *combating racism and racial discrimination in policing*.

In the private sector, ECRI has had to deal with religious discrimination in employment and housing. This targets, among others, women with headscarves. As for the issue of headscarves in schools, this has been examined by ECRI under the angle of indirect discrimination, when an apparently neutral factor unduly disadvantages persons belonging, inter alia, to a religion. ECRI has asked the States concerned to monitor the situation and highlighted the need for dialogue with representatives of the Muslim communities in this connection.

### **IV. Conclusion**

This brings me naturally to the conclusion of my presentation. Dialogue between the authorities and the representatives of religious groups but also between the different groups is essential in a multicultural society; also essential is the monitoring of the situation by the authorities, through a process of data collection that respects the

principles of data protection and self-identification. However, multiculturalism should not be seen as an end in itself. What ECRI strives for is integrated societies. For us, successful integration is a two-way process, a process of mutual recognition, which has nothing to do with assimilation. An "integrated society" in ECRI's conception is equally inclusive of majority and minority groups.

This is the main message I wanted to convey today and I look forward to our discussions on this issue.

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## **The International Coalition for Religious Freedom: Should Kazakhstan head the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe?**

Business Wire (09.03.2009) / HRWF (10.03.2009) - Email: [info@hrwf.net](mailto:info@hrwf.net) - Website: <http://www.hrwf.net> - The International Coalition for Religious Freedom calls for Kazakhstan to overturn the conviction of Elizaveta Drenicheva, who is currently serving a two-year sentence due to a court's ruling that her church's innocent religious teachings were interpreted by the court as a criminal offense. Her appeal is scheduled for March 10.

On January 9, 2009, Elizaveta Eugenievna Drenicheva was sentenced to two years in prison by Almalinsky district court of Almaty, Kazakhstan, under the chairmanship of Judge Z.B. Keikibasova. She had been charged under Section 164, part 1 of the Kazakh criminal code. The judge ruled that she was guilty of a "crime against peace and security of humankind" because she had taught that certain groups of people are inferior on the basis of their relation to "tribal and class identity."

In fact, Mrs. Drenicheva was simply teaching the Unification Church's doctrine on original sin, which holds that all human beings are born into a sinful state and need to attain salvation through God's grace and their own efforts. The Unification Church is an officially registered religion in Kazakhstan and had received no previous indication from the government that its teachings were legally problematic.

Kazakhstan is currently facing a crossroads in its human-rights policy. Its constitutional committee (high court) recently overturned a repressive new religious law. However, Mrs. Drenicheva's case shows that certain forces in Kazakhstan still have the power to imprison religious minorities by distorting their teachings.

Today, Dr. Antonio Stango, a distinguished advisor to the European Parliament Subcommittee on Human Rights, expressed his concern about the decline of human rights in that country: "Kazakhstan's commitments to improving freedom of expression, including freedom of religion, are not being implemented. Jailings of Baptists, Pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Hare Krishnas, Unification Church members, and others confirm the hardships still faced by the followers of the so-called 'non traditional' religions. Particularly as Chair-in-office of the OSCE next year, Kazakhstan should adopt more positive measures and defend the integrity of the OSCE's human rights principles."

We call on human-rights organizations, political and diplomatic leaders, and all people of conscience to signal to the appropriate Kazakh authorities that Mrs. Drenicheva's conviction must be overturned on appeal and that she should be immediately released.

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