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The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Azerbaijan to the United Nations Office and other International Organizations in Geneva presents its compliments to the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, and has the honor to transmit herewith the information by the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan for the report on steps taken by States to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping, stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons, based on religion or belief to be submitted by the Secretary-General to the General Assembly at its seventy-fifth session.


Geneva, 28 May 2020

Enclosure: 3 pages

Office of the United Nations
High Commissioner for Human Rights
GENEVA
Updated INFORMATION of the State Committee on Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan on implementing Human Rights Council Resolution A/RES/74/164 entitled “Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief” with regard to Azerbaijan

The policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan pursued in the domain of religions and beliefs is based on the freedom of thought, speech and conscience, bearing in mind the existence of religion in variety of forms in the society. Furthermore, the policy of the government in the field of religions and beliefs is based upon the principles and norms of the international law, international agreements that Republic of Azerbaijan is party to, Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan and other legal documents. The Republic of Azerbaijan has implemented relevant measures aimed at state-religion relations like all other democratic states. Necessary steps have been taken such as legal, institutional and religious activities towards preventing religious intolerance and discrimination, violence based on religion, as well as strengthening dialogue among various religions in Azerbaijan for this purpose.

Legal Framework

The state-religion relations in Azerbaijan has been performed according to the Article 18 of "State and Religion", Article 25 of "Right to equality", Article 47 of "Freedom of thought and speech", Article 48 of "Freedom of conscience", 49 Article of "Freedom of assembly" and Article 71 of " Guarantees for rights and freedoms of man and citizen " of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan. In addition, law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Freedom of Religious Belief is a main legal source to regulate the relations arising from activities of religious associations, define the duties, rights and status of religious associations and create guarantees for implementation of freedom of religious belief in the country. Law "On fight against religious extremism" was adopted in 2015 to define legal and organizational grounds for the fighting against religious extremism, determine rights and obligations of state authorities and citizens in order to fight against religious extremism. It plays a significant role in increasing the efficiency of the state policy on formation and improvement of the legal framework to present-day requirements. A number of amendments and changes were made to the Administrative Offenses and Criminal codes in order to ensure religious freedom effectively in the country and appropriate state policy was established in this area during the past period.

In total, 135 (4 non-Islamic, 131 Islamic) religious communities were registered from June 2018 to May 2020.

Institutional activity

The State Committee on Religious Associations of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SCRA) which was established on June 21, 2001, is the central executive body implementing state policy in the field of religion is doing its best for the development and enhancement of the democracy in the country as well as giving policy recommendations in this regard. The activity of SCRA pursued in the domain of state-religion relations is based on establishing favorable condition for the implementation of religious freedom, conducting the state registration and registry maintenance of religious communities in line with the law of the Republic of Azerbaijan, strengthening tolerance, mutual understanding and respect among religious communities of different faiths and preventing religious radicalism, extremism, confrontation, discrimination and other negative cases. The Committee also organizes visits to holy places out of the country and takes part in obtaining interstate agreements on these issues.
Foundation of Moral Values Promotion

The Foundation of Moral Values Promotion organized under the State Committee on Religious Associations on October 10, 2017 by the Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan has held a series of events since June 2018 to strengthen tolerance and multicultural traditions in our country. Thus, the project “Our unity is our worth” was organized by the Foundation with the participation of religious leaders from different regions.

As a part of the project, seminars were held in 4 different regions of Azerbaijan, unity prayers were conducted, historical and religious monuments were visited. Another project of the foundation is the Tolerant Azerbaijan project, which is implemented in cooperation with non-Islamic religious communities. As a part of this project, conferences were organized on the eve of their remarkable days jointly with the Baku and Azerbaijan Eparchy of the Russian Orthodox Church, Community of the Mountain Jews and the Albanian-Udi Christian Church.

In addition, with the financial support of the Foundation, a number of projects have been conducted by Islamic religious communities. Some of the projects have been dedicated to the topics on radicalism and extremism, as well as multiculturalism and tolerance.

Government’s policy on religion

According to the statistics, about 96 percent of the population of Azerbaijan are Muslims while other four percent is considered as Christians, Jews, Bahaists, Krishnaites and representatives of other religions. 942 religious communities have been registered as of November 25, 2019. Thus, 907 of them are Muslim and 35 of them are non-Islamic religious communities while 24 of them are Christian, 8 Jewish, 2 Baha‘i, and 1 Krishnaite. According to the Article 8 of the “Law on Freedom of Religious Belief” of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Islamic religious communities are subordinated by the Caucasian Muslims Board, in terms of organizational matters, whereas non-Islamic religious associations have the right to be subordinated and to change their respective subordination to religious centers (organizations) operational in the Republic of Azerbaijan and outside, Currently, 2250 mosques, 14 churches and 7 synagogues are operating in Azerbaijan. The government has created favorable conditions to celebrate remarkable religious ceremonies by the Muslim and non-Muslim communities operating in Azerbaijan. According to President’s order, to provide financial assistance to religious communities, envisaged by the state budget of the Republic of Azerbaijan for 2019, from the reserve fund of the President 2 million AZN to Caucasian Muslims Board, 350 thousand AZN to Russian Orthodox Eparchy of Baku and Azerbaijan, 350 thousand AZN to Mountain Jews Community of Baku city, 350 thousand AZN to Baku Religious Community of European Jews, 150 thousand AZN to Roman Catholic Apostolic Prefecture of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 150 thousand AZN to Religious Community of the Alban-Udi Christians of Azerbaijan, as well as for the provision of financial assistance to non-Muslim religious communities 100 thousand AZN to Moral Values Promotion Fund under State Committee on Religious Associations are allocated. Note that the funds allocated to the Foundation are distributed among the minor non-Islamic-oriented religious groups, taking into account the number of their admirers.

International cooperation

SCRA collaborates with a number of international, regional and non-governmental organizations as well as experts operating in this area on promotion of religious tolerance, prevention of religious extremism and violence, fighting terrorism. Thus, organizations such as UNESCO, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of OSCE, Organization of Islamic Cooperation, North-South Center of Council of Europe, EMISCO (European Muslim Initiative for Social Cohesion), FEMYSO (Forum of European Muslim Youth and Student Organisations), Enar, Different think tanks, such as СЕЛ (A Jewish Contribution to an inclusive Europe) and etc. are the key partners of the State Committee in this sphere. At the same time, the Committee is interested in mutual exchange of experience with the similar institutions of Muslim and non-Muslim countries in this field and building the bilateral relations to organize
joint seminars and trainings. Currently, the State Committee cooperates closely with Office of Religious Affairs and Foundation of Dayanat Affairs of Turkey, State Agency on Religious Affairs of Georgia, Council for mutual activities with religious associations of Russian Federation, Organization of Islamic Culture and Relations of Iran, Ministry of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs of Qatar, Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da'wah and Guidance of Saudi Arabia, State Secretary on Religious Affairs of Romania, Ministry of Civil Society and Religious Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan and IOM Azerbaijan.

On March 5, 2019, the international conference on "From Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogue to Cooperation" was held jointly by the SCRA and the Caucasus Muslims Board.

On April 25, the Second International Conference on "Interreligious Dialogue and Radicalism" was held jointly by the SCRA, Baku Office of the European Union and the Azerbaijan Diplomatic Academy (ADA).

The SCRA in cooperation jointly with the IOM Office in Azerbaijan has organized numerous trainings for professionals dealing with professionals on threat of radicalization and violent extremism.

More than 7Q countries from 5 continents, leaders and representatives of traditional religions as well as 500 high-level representatives from around 10 reputable international organizations participated in the II Baku Summit of World Religious Leaders, hosted by Azerbaijan November 14-15, in honor of Azerbaijan's contribution to the development of interreligious dialogue, promotion of human values, such as mutual understanding and human solidarity.

**Education**

"Introduction to multiculturalism" (undergraduate studies) and "Azerbaijan multiculturalism" (graduate studies) which have been taught in high schools as an elective subject since 2015 (the project of BIMC) have begun to be taught as compulsory subjects this year.

**Awareness-raising campaigns**

In January-February 2020, dozens of educational activities were held with the participation of religious confessions operating in Azerbaijan and representatives of the relevant government bodies. Lectures were given by the representatives of the relevant government agencies, specialists and experts, religious scholars with the State Committee at the events.

Most of the attendants were youngsters, clergy, education staff, as well as media people and representatives from government or non-governmental organizations.

**Expertise of religious literature**

a) Checking the religious literatures in 1220 titles, it has prevented the import and distribution of 20 books promoting religious intolerance, discrimination and radicalism based on applications received by the Department of Religious Expertise in January- May 2020.

b) A review of 55 religious literature submitted to religious expertise for publication in the country and 1 of them which support religious intolerance, discrimination and radicalism were not considered expedient.

c) 77 religious literatures and articles that sent by law enforcement agencies during operational activities to religious expertise in order to prevent religious radicalism were reviewed and it was determined that 3 of them supported religious intolerance, discrimination and they were imported and manufactured without proper consent as well.