

Statement
of the Delegation of Armenia
6th Forum on Minority Issues
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Thank you Madam Chairperson,

First I would like to join previous speakers and to thank panellists for their comprehensive presentations. Armenia gives great importance to the protection of the rights of minorities, especially those with different faith and religion.

The Constitution of Armenia approved by the 2005 referendum most precisely defines the right to freedom of religion or belief, declaring that "freedom of activities for all religious organizations in accordance with the law shall be guaranteed in the Republic of Armenia". The evidence of maintenance of religious pluralism in the country is well-demonstrated by following comparison: in 1997 14 religious organizations were registered as legal entities in Armenia. Currently, there are about 70 religious organizations in the State Registry of Armenia, representing diverse religious movements and directions.

In order to provide equal opportunity for members of religious minorities to perform their duties by serving military or alternative service, the law on alternative service has been adopted in Armenia. However, for last two years, cases of refusal from alternative service have become frequent. This issue continuously remained under the attention of relevant State structures and the Ombudsman, who submitted proposals on the improvement of a legislative field and its practical applications. On May 2013 new amendments to the law on alternative service have been adopted, according to which the period for alternative service has been reduced from 36 months to 30 months.

Armenia believes that the legislative framework and its amendments in accordance with the international human rights law standards are very important, but they should also be accompanied by administrative measures and awareness raising campaigns. The role of human rights education is crucial, particularly in combating violence against the religious minorities.

Having numerous Armenian communities residing in various parts of the world, Armenia considers, that the fight against racial discrimination is another means of protection and promotion of religious minorities. Very often, religious minorities belong to different national, ethnic and linguistic groups, and the protection of their religious freedom should be viewed in the broader context of the implementation of full range of rights.

Combating all kinds of discrimination and intolerance, as well as the incitement of hatred towards the minorities is essential in the elimination of the violence against religious minorities. Armenia considers that the constant attention of the international community to this issue is very important. The international community should continuously condemn and combat all forms of discrimination and incitement of hatred towards people belonging to other national or ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; as well as intimidation and harassment of advocates of the rights of the religious minorities. The preventative measures are especially important in conflict situation when these groups are especially vulnerable.

In conclusion, Armenia would like to reassure its commitment to the protection and promotion of minority rights, including the religious minorities. We highly value the participation of the minorities themselves in consultation process with states in addressing the challenges of the implementation of their rights.

Thank you.