

2013 6th session of the Forum on Minority Issues of the UN Council on Human Rights, "The next steps in ensuring freedom of religion and belief: the guarantee of religious rights of minorities"

Main ideas of the speech of O.Koroliova the Deputy Director of the Department of Culture of the government of the Russian Federation

Session 2. Legal basis and legal concepts.

Madam Chairman,
Ladies and gentlemen!

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak.

On December the 12th, 2013, our country will celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Basic Law - the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the provisions of which guarantee the freedom of conscience and religion to everyone (Article 28), as well as equality of rights and freedoms for every person and citizen, regardless of religion or beliefs (Article 19). These principles have become the main direction of the state policy in the field of protection of freedom of conscience and religion and relations with religious associations.

Over the years, religious groups in Russia have become an essential part of civil society and have gained the opportunity to participation in public life.

Today in Russia there are more than 26 thousand religious organizations registered that represent more than 60 different faiths and denominations, and their number is increasing annually. In the first 9 months of 2013 alone the Ministry of Justice of Russia and its territorial bodies have registered 872 new religious organization.

The current legislation of the Russian Federation, which regulates the field of the protection of freedom of conscience, includes in addition to the above mentioned norms of the Constitution of the Russian Federation, the generally recognized principles and norms of international law in the field of human rights and freedoms and international treaties of the Russian Federation, the provisions of the special-purpose Federal Law of September 26, 1997 № 125-FZ "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations", as well as the rules of more than 100 individual legal acts concerning certain aspects of the activities of religious organizations and regulations of the Russian Federation.

2. This body of legal rules provides opportunities for provision of charitable, cultural, educational, publishing activities; conducting pastoral work at social institutions, and places with the specific conditions that limit the rights and freedoms of individuals - military and naval units, and establishments of the penitentiary system; that is, wherever one is need of clerical assistance, a word of comfort and support.

I just want to note that all these years there is a continuous, daily process of improving the regulatory framework in the area of church-state relations that promotes the harmonious development of society.

Since 1 September 2013 came into effect a new version of the law "On Education in the Russian Federation", which regulates, among other issues, obtaining of religious education, as well as learning the basics of spiritual and moral culture of the peoples of Russia in the secondary school.

The mechanism for the transfer of state or municipal owned property to religious organizations for religious purposes is being improved under the regulation by the Federal Law from November 30, 2010 № 327-FZ.

Expanding are the opportunities for religious organizations to conduct social work and charitable activities. Federal law from April 5 2010, № 40-FZ "On Amendments to Separate Legislative Acts of the Russian Federation on the support of socially oriented non-profit organizations" provides for the granting of benefits,

preferences and grants on a competitive basis to relevant organizations, including religious organizations.

Separate regulatory issues cover the restoration of religious sites of historical and culture significance.

Over the past few years in the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation the institution of regimental priests has been revived and set forth.

Particular attention in Russia is paid to prison ministering, because the mission of the priest in this case is particularly relevant, and people who are serving criminal sanctions are in particular need of moral help and support.

Significant efforts are made by the state to protect the believers, practising any religion. The most pressing issue today apart from the inter-religious relations, although these are extremely important in a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional country like Russia, is the relationship between the believing part of society and an aggressive-minded citizens who share secular ideology.

This problem is not unique for Russia, but for all European countries: vandalism, caricatures of religious symbols, attacks, threats, offensive films and videos, actions that offend believers and their symbols.

In Russia, it was decided to establish criminal and administrative liability for persons who insult the religious beliefs of citizens. Since July 1, 2013 came into force the relevant "Law on protection of religious feelings of believers". Its adoption was to a great extent initiated by public entities – religious organizations and public associations, fully supported by the state, and has attracted considerable public attention.

The second important mechanism for protection of the rights of believers, including those of religious minorities, is the creation of dialogue platforms and advisory bodies.

Since 1994, Russia has a Commission on Religious Associations under the Government of the Russian Federation. The Commission is a coordinating body, looking into issues arising in relations between the state and religious associations. In

its work involves representatives of religious organizations - the Russian Orthodox Church, Russian Orthodox Old Believers' Church, centralized Muslim organizations of Russia, Jewish religious and Buddhist organizations of Russia, Roman Catholic, Protestant organizations of Russia {Russian Union of Christians of Evangelical Faith, the Union of Associations of Seventh Day Adventists, the Russian Union of Evangelical Christian Baptists and other bodies.

Since 1995, operates the Council for Cooperation with Religious Associations under the Russian President. The Council is an advisory body which carries out a preliminary review of issues and preparation of proposals for the President of the Russian Federation relating to the interaction of the President with religious organizations and improve the spiritual culture of the society. It consists of representatives of religious organizations.

Since 1998, the Inter-religious Council of Russia operates in the Russian Federation. The formation of the Religious Council of Russia has been the logical culmination of many years of fruitful inter-religious cooperation.

The subjects of the Russian Federation have a widespread practice of establishing inter-religious councils and commissions, as well as supporting social initiatives of religious organizations in the framework of cooperation agreements. As part of the agreements social, educational and charitable projects are implemented. In all regions of the Russian Federation representatives of religious organizations are involved in advisory and expert activity. Religious leaders are members of the Public Chamber of the Russian Federation as well as regional Public Chambers.

The third very important point of protection of rights of believers is monitoring, which allows us to keep a close watch on violations of human rights and freedoms, to monitor the well-being of believers, the processes taking place in the field of interfaith relations. Currently, this monitoring is conducted by the Ministry of Regional Development of the Russian Federation. Recently the monitoring has been complemented by information submitted to the Ministry by the religious organizations themselves, national-cultural autonomies, and media. Work is underway to establish a

comprehensive monitoring system that will track the sphere of relations between the state and religious associations, and effectively protect the rights of believers.

Thank you for the attention!