

Statement made by FLNCA at the 7th Session in Geneva in November 2014

In the 21st century the problem of ethnic minorities is becoming even more significant and burning than in the 20th century. Ethnic conflicts are spreading and growing all over the world – in Asia, in Africa and in Europe. An explanation to this phenomenon should be found and the international community should develop a strategy to prevent these conflicts.

The explanation to interethnic conflicts should be looked for in the attitude of governments to national minorities their respective countries. Many governments believe that in order to strengthen the unity of their societies they should make it ethnically homogenous and pursue a policy of assimilation of national minorities to the ethnic majorities of their countries. This policy encourages the minorities to forget their ethnic culture, native language, history and ethnic identity. Within the framework of such policy the governments prohibit any displays of their ethnic minorities' cultural peculiarities considering them as political anti-governmental actions. Multi-ethnicity is seen as a threat to the sovereignty and integrity of their states. Such policy is deeply erroneous as it violates basic human rights.

In Azerbaijan, right in the heart of the downtown in the ancient fortress built in 1169 and since then was called "Lezghi Mosque". Even the Soviet authorities could not ignore the fact of belonging this mosque to Lezghin minority and put a nameplate "Lezghin Mosque" on this monument under the protection of UNESCO. Now there is no the plate on it. The mosque was renamed just because there was the Lezghi minority in the name of the mosque, the minority that has been living in this territory since the times immemorial.

Though the policy of forced assimilation of ethnic minorities in Azerbaijan started to be pursued immediately after the collapse of the Russian empire and continued within the frame of the Azeri Soviet republic, this policy of assimilating and even eliminating the Lezghin minority had never been so open and cynical as it became after Azerbaijan acquired its independence in the 90-s. Lezghins in Azerbaijan do not have radio and TV programmes, Lezghin language is taught only in primary schools with only two lessons per week and not in all regions compactly settled by Lezghins. Lezgins are not allowed to sing their songs at their wedding in public places and they are not allowed even to wear T-shirts with inscriptions "Lezghin" as such displays of ethnic belonging are considered to be subversive and threatening to the integrity of Azerbaijan. We can set a lot of examples like these ones and our information is supported by the Report compiled on the basis of the joint UNPO-FLNCA mission to Azerbaijan in September 2013 that included members of the European and Flemish parliaments.

We fully respect the political sovereignty of Azerbaijan and at the same time we insist that the Azeri government should respect ethnic diversity of their country and provide support to all ethnic minorities who live in Azerbaijan. We, from our side, will do our best to achieve this goal with the help of all civilized tools recognized by the international community.