



The speech of Mr. [Maksym VASIN](#) , Executive Director of the Institute for Religious Freedom (Ukraine), during the OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on Freedom of Religion or Belief, Fostering Mutual Respect and Understanding. The Hofburg in Vienna, 2 July 2015.

During last year human rights activists recorded dozens terrible facts of religious persecution in Donbas region in the eastern Ukraine, provided by Russian-backed militants. There were threats, beating and kidnappings of priest and pastors, even tortures and murders because of their religious identification. Small part of such evidences is described in [the Report, presented here by the human rights activists](#)

But another alarming signal is the current position of separatists. Month ago, on the 18-th of May 2015, the head of the self-proclaimed “Donetsk People’s Republic” **Aleksandr Zakharchenko** [stated](#) in Donetsk that he recognizes only four of the denominations – Orthodoxy of the Moscow Patriarchate, Roman Catholicism, Islam and Judaism. And he also stated: “We must not oppress believers of these four denominations. On the other hand I will strictly fight against sects. I don't want ...that the system of education of our youth will be broken by pseudo religions and sects.”

So, unfortunately, it is possible to predict the emergence of new crimes on religious ground in the Donbas region by the Russian separatists and combatants. While reviewing the

denominations that turned out to be targets of religious persecution on territories of Eastern Ukraine we can find among them Orthodox of the Kyiv Patriarchate, the Greek Catholics, Evangelical Christians – Baptists, Pentecostals, Adventists and other protestant branches. Therefore these are confessions that according to the leader of separatists in Donetsk are “pseudo religions and sects” which militants intend to harshly fight against”.

Apart from physical reprisal threats, which forced many priests of denominations mentioned above to leave the zone of military conflict in Donbas, dozens of religious buildings – temples, prayer houses and rehabilitation centers still remain captured. Believers still have no access to these facilities because they remain in use of separatists for military and other purposes.

And my recommendation for this Meeting, that the OSCE members have to make all efforts at the highest international level to stop the religious persecution on the territories of war conflict in the eastern Ukraine. Such treatments against believers stepped to terrible scale that allows us to describe them as war crimes. The whole world must stand out to protect the fundamental right for freedom of religion or belief for those people who experience daily sufferings caused by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. Thank you for your attention!

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