

**REPORT
ON THE SITUATION WITH RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
IN THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN**

ASTANA, 2014

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PREFACE

Religious freedom is a necessary and inalienable condition for the development of a democratic society; it is one of the major elements of the system of human rights and freedoms.

The ideal of religious freedom has achieved extremely wide recognition throughout the world, and at the present time, it is enshrined not only in all major international documents – human rights declarations and covenants, but also in the overwhelming majority of national constitutions throughout the world.

The issue of religious freedom is closely intertwined with political, legal and moral processes going on in a separate society.

The Republic of Kazakhstan is a secular democratic state where everyone is guaranteed the freedom of conscience, and followers of all faiths are equal before the law.

Kazakhstan is developing its own legal basis and legal instruments for the operation of government and public institutions on the basis of the national law and international legal norms and standards. Herewith, international legal norms and standards have a significant priority in ensuring the rights and freedoms of citizens, irrespective of social, racial, ethnic, lingual or religious affiliation.

The provision of religious freedom is one of the vitally important interests of the Republic of Kazakhstan as a multi-faith country. It is one of our key components of further democratic and legal development.

In its activities, Kazakhstan relies on commonly recognized international acts in the human rights arena. In this regard, Kazakhstan's legal basis in ensuring religious freedom complies with common European and world democratic standards. Kazakhstan makes active efforts to improve legislation on religious activities to develop constructive relationships between the government and all faiths.

One of the first legal acts passed after Kazakhstan became independent was the 1992 RK law “On Religious Freedom and Religious Associations” which determined basic principles of our young country's religious policy.

The law established equal and favorable conditions for faiths to perform their functions, and facilitated significant growth of the number of religious organizations in Kazakhstan.

The principal achievement of that Law was that it provided complete freedom from inter-faith conflicts in a multiethnic and multi-faith Kazakhstan, and it also developed a positive international image of this country as the initiator of discussion sites at regional, national and global levels.

For the purpose of further implementation of the constitutional principles of religious freedom, in October 2011, Kazakhstan passed new law “On Religious Activity and Religious Associations”. At this stage, this Law is the major normative legal act which regulates the area of religious activities and operation of religious organizations.

In general, the legislative measures have the support of people and experts, and they have a positive impact on the country's religious situation and on the general situation with human rights in Kazakhstan.

A lot of experts have come to the conclusion that the country's religious legislation complies with major principles that serve as the basis of international standards adopted by the OSCE and a number of other international organizations; the legislation also complies with the experience of the world's developed democratic nations.

Provisions on the freedom of conscience set in international human rights documents, the RK Constitution and other regulations and laws have for more than 22 years been put into practice through the activity of government organs and religious organizations. In May 2011, Kazakhstan established the Agency for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan to maintain the inter-faith accord in the society, to further provide for citizens' right to religious freedom.

Religious organizations of Kazakhstan take an active part in social and cultural activities aimed at strengthening peace and religious accord. Leaders of the largest religious associations are members of the national and small Assemblies of the people of Kazakhstan, of the Human Rights Commission under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, of Councils for relations with religious organizations under the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan and local government organs – regional governors' offices, city mayors' and district offices.

At this stage, the active revival of religious traditions, construction of religious buildings – mosques, churches, praying houses – and opening of new religious educational centers, and religious media are under way.

Under its Constitution Kazakhstan is a secular state and guarantees free development of all faiths and has solid practical experience in enforcement of Kazakhstan's current norms and international commitments in the area of observing the rights to religious freedom.

To ensure strict observance of the constitutional right to freedom of conscience and religion the government takes persistent actions designed to disclose and eliminate any infringements on the law in that area, to restitute believers' infringed rights irrespective of their religious affiliation.

As a member of the UN Human Rights Council the country maintains close cooperation with international organizations in the area of implementation and protection of human rights and freedoms.

The United Nations (UN), the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and other international organizations assessed the effectiveness of Kazakhstan's current system of securing public peace and accord as positive.

During his 2001 visit, Pope John Paul II gave a high assessment of Kazakhstan's existing model of inter-faith accord. So did leaders of various world and traditional faiths who visited Kazakhstan.

The international initiative of the Republic of Kazakhstan on holding Congresses of leaders of world and traditional religions in the country's capital Astana every four years since 2003 serves an important confirmation of the fact that Kazakhstan's state policy is aimed at keeping and strengthening the inter-faith harmony and observance of the human rights to religious freedom.

As part of the Congress' agenda, Kazakhstan offers to share its experience in securing inter-faith peace and accord with the world community. At the January 2010 inauguration meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna, the country's President N.A. Nazarbayev noted: "Our model of interethnic and inter-faith accord is Kazakhstan's real contribution into the worldwide process of

interaction of various faiths. At my initiative, since 2003, three Congresses of world and traditional religious leaders were held in Astana to give birth to a unique forum of the interfaith dialogue”.

Kazakhstan will remain a multi-faith state where religious organizations of various religious trends operate freely, and all citizens, irrespective of their attitude to religion, enjoy equal rights and opportunities including freedom of conscience and religion.

1. RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN

At this stage, the country’s religious diversity which includes Kazakhstan’s traditional faiths (Islam of Hanafi school and Orthodox Christianity) and non-traditional faiths and schools, that provide for social stability, peace and accord in the state. Despite the diversity of various views, traditions and cultures Kazakhstan remains a nation free from conflicts of religious nature.

The steadily increasing role of religion in the life of society was one of the characteristic features of development of inter-faith relations in the Republic of Kazakhstan over the recent two decades and it has accounted for a significant growth of the number and quality of religious institutions.

According to assessments made by experts the number of believers has reached 90-95% compared to 20-25% in mid-1980s.

In the number of believers, religious organizations of Muslims and Orthodox Christians are traditional leaders. According to the 2009 national census they amount to more than 90% of believers. In particular, 70.2% identified themselves as Muslims, 26.0% as Christians, 0.3% as Judaists, 0.1% as Buddhists, and 0.2% as followers of other faiths. Along with that, 2.8% considered themselves to be non-believers.

The number of religious organizations in Kazakhstan went up from 671 on January 1, 1989 to 3434 in 2013.

Followers of 18 various faiths representing the religious interests of the multi-ethnic and multi-faith 17-million population of the Republic of Kazakhstan co-exist and interact peacefully in the country. Religions in Kazakhstan represent people of various ethnicities, languages, cultural and social groups following various faiths, differing in religious practice and views of the surrounding world.

With the account of Kazakhstani society’s historic and cultural orientation basically towards two traditional faiths: the Sunni Islam (Hanafi school) and Orthodox Christianity, the most numerous religious organizations are Muslim – 2367. They account for more than two thirds of the total number of all believers in the country. This faith also has the largest number of religious buildings (2366).

Kazakhstan’s Russian Orthodox Church with its 293 religious organizations occupies the second place in the number of followers in Kazakhstan.

The next largest faith in Kazakhstan is the Roman Catholic Church which has 84 religious communities.

Protestant religious organizations occupy a significant place in Kazakhstan’s religious landscape. Their number exceeds 500.

In addition to those listed above, seven Jewish communities, two religious organizations of Buddhism, and 18 organizations of religions non-traditional for Kazakhstan (Mormons, Hare Krishna, Baha'I, Moonists) operate here.

Islam in Kazakhstan

Islam is the dominant faith amongst Kazakhstan's population.

Besides ethnic Kazakhs who compose the majority, the country's Muslim community is represented by Uzbeks, Uyghur, Tatars, Kyrgyz, Azeri, Tajiks, Kurds, Dungans, Chechens and other ethnicities. It also has a small number of representatives of European ethnic groups who converted to Islam.

The Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan which has the status of a national Islamic religious organization with a network of branch offices in all regions of the country.

The total number of mosques in Kazakhstan amounts to 2366. A significant number of them (1463) are located in the country's Southern regions: South Kazakhstan, Zhambyl, Almaty and Kyzyl Orda provinces.

Kazakhstan's Orthodox Christian Church

In terms of the number of its believers, Orthodox Christianity comes second after Islam. Its ethnic structure is basically composed of citizens of European ethnic groups (Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians). With limited exceptions, most community leaders are European.

At this stage, 293 religious organizations operate in Kazakhstan including 270 parishes, nine eparchies, and the national religious organization – the Metropolitan circuit. Besides, within the field of the Orthodox Church, the Armenian Apostolic church and 8 Old Believer churches operate.

70 people, mainly, citizens of the Russian Federation, are missionaries of the Orthodox Christianity.

The Roman Catholic Church in Kazakhstan

Catholicism began to develop in Kazakhstan in the 18th century.

The Catholic administration (Metropolia) operates in Kazakhstan. Its center is the Archdiocese of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Astana. 84 Catholic communities operate. Five of them are branches of the Greek Catholic Church in Kazakhstan.

During the 1998 head of state N.A. Nazarbayev's official visit to Vatican, the Agreement on Relations between Kazakhstan and the Holy See was reached. It was signed on September 24, 1998 and approved by the May 19, 1999 Decree #141 of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Judaism in Kazakhstan

A massive influx of the Jewish population to the Republic of Kazakhstan was noted in 1930s-1940s. Formally, Kazakhstan's Jewish community has functioned in Kazakhstan since 1994.

At this stage, seven local Jewish religious organizations function in Kazakhstan. All communities have specialized religious buildings located in the cities of Astana, Almaty, Pavlodar, Shymkent and Ust-Kamenogorsk.

Buddhism in Kazakhstan

Buddhism began to spread in Kazakhstan in the fifth and six centuries due to the growing influence of the Kushan Empire. At the present time, Buddhism is cultivated in Kazakhstan mainly by missionaries.

As of today, two Buddhist religious organizations function in Kazakhstan located in Almaty and West Kazakhstan province.

Protestantism in Kazakhstan

The religious teaching of Protestantism is not uniform and is characterized by a permanently growing number of religious trends.

Some Protestant groups appeared in Kazakhstan when it joined Russia (Lutherans), whereas new Protestant groups appeared after 1991. In general, as of January 2013, more than 500 local religious organizations of Protestant teachings were registered in Kazakhstan. Herewith, Protestantism comes second after Islam in the number of religious organizations (500 Protestant versus 293 Orthodox organizations), the second after Catholicism in the number of missionaries, and second after Islam in the number of religious buildings which Protestants have twice as many as Orthodox Christians.

The largest and most represented in the country's regions are Protestant communities of the Pentecostal church. A distinct feature of their religious teaching is its mystical and individualistic understanding of the church which includes the belief in an individual person's ability to get a gift of spiritual revival from above and "Baptism in the Holy Spirit".

They appeared in Kazakhstan in early 1990s and ushered a quite significant group of charismatic churches. The largest of them are religious association "Sun Bok Ym" (10 organizations), religious association New Life (41 organizations), Agape (29 organizations), Source of Life (29 organizations) and a group of American Korean churches founded by missionaries. At the present time, they make up about half of all Protestant organizations in the country (193 organizations).

The next biggest in the number of organizations and believers is the community of Evangelical Christian Baptists (185 organizations). They include centralized organizations – the Union of Evangelical Christian Baptist Churches with the total of 148 religious organizations and 37 autonomous Baptist churches. The biggest number of Evangelical Christian Baptists are in Almaty province (24 organizations), Almaty city (15 organizations), Southern Kazakhstan (12 organizations), and Karaganda province (58 organizations including 44 branches).

Presbyterian churches incorporate 92 organizations. The biggest among them is local religious organization "Grace-Blagodat" (30 organizations).

Religious groups which appeared in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries function actively in Kazakhstan's regions. There are local religious association of Jehovah's Witnesses (60 organizations), local religious organization of The Seventh Day Adventists (42 organizations) and 25 local religious organizations of the New Apostolic Church.

The Evangelical Lutheran church is represented by 14 local religious associations in Almaty, Akmolinskaya, Zhambyl, Karaganda, Kostanay, Pavlodar, East Kazakhstan, North Kazakhstan provinces, the cities of Astana and Almaty.

As of today, 12 religious organizations of Methodists operate in the country. The country's first Methodist church was registered in Almaty city in 1991. They emerged due to active efforts of foreign missionaries from the Korean Methodist church and Russian Unified Methodist church.

Mennonites

Mennonites appeared in Kazakhstan in the end of the eighteenth century. As of today, one local religious organization of Mennonites operates in the Karaganda province. It has three branches and four religious buildings.

Religious educational institutions in Kazakhstan

At this stage, in total, 15 religious educational institutions operate in Kazakhstan. Two of them are Christian, 13 are Islamic. The total number of religious courses for beginners and Sunday schools is 400 (334 are Islamic, 47 are Orthodox Christian, 15 are Protestant, and four are Catholic).

Missionary activities in the territory of Kazakhstan

Recent years marked a growing number of missionaries arriving in Kazakhstan. In 2003, 89 missionaries were registered, in 2011, by the time of passing the Law, 200 missionaries worked in the country; in 2013, the total number of registered missionaries amounted to 359. Thus, in 10 years, the number of missionaries increased by four times and it continues to grow.

Re-registration of religious associations

Under the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Religious Activity and Religious Associations" the active religious organizations were re-registered. It resulted in updating and systematization of the country's religious area.

If by January 1, 2011, 4551 religious organizations operated in the country, after the re-registration was completed on October 25, 2012, their number was 3088.

In this regard, mainly, religious organizations which carried out no activities for years, for example, such organizations as Brothers in Christ (Christadelphians), the Church of the Last Testament (Vissarions), Alzhan - the House of Salvation, the Society of Christian Science, etc. failed to pass the re-registration. Some religious organizations merged. In general, the majority of religious organizations passed registration without hindrances pursuant to the new requirements of the Law.

The registration procedure brought the legislative basis into compliance with reality. On a number of occasions, an upsizing of some religious organizations took place; it facilitated and streamlined their interaction with government organs. The re-registration was instrumental in the clarification of religious affiliation of a number of communities.

The work done by experts resulted in initiation of a new classification of religious organizations. If earlier the country had 46 faiths, now their number is 18. It should be noted that occasionally, some religious organizations were erroneously registered as independent faiths. Moreover, during the re-registration of religious organizations a more adequate classification based on a strictly scientific theological point of view was done.

In this regard, religious organizations with the same religious affiliation were grouped according to faiths. For example, religious organizations of the Nazarene's Mission, Grace, Hope, Emmanuel earlier registered as an independent faith and are now grouped into one faith of Presbyterian churches. Such religious organizations as Sun Bok Ym, New Life, Agape, Harvest, the Church of Full Gospel, Blagodat joined the group of Pentecostal churches.

To eliminate infringement on human rights, wide-scale work on explanation of requirements of the new Law was carried out. This work was done both directly during meetings with representatives of religious organizations, and through the media.

Legislative requirements for registration, operation and activities of religious communities brought order in the work of entities in religious relations, provided for the transparency and openness of their activities to the society and the state. After passing registration and becoming a fully-fledged legal entity, religious organizations obtained the legal status determined by legislation for full-scale and legal operation in Kazakhstani society.

Legislation also provides mechanisms for settlement of situations where a religious organization failed to pass registration because it did not fully comply with the requirements, for example, the requirement of a minimum membership of 50 people. In this regard, small religious communities with fewer than fifty members can merge and pass registration as a branch of a religious association. Smaller groups or individual citizens can also turn to local government organs which under the law coordinate location of venues for holding religious ceremonies outside religious buildings.

It should be noted that registration of religious organizations is not Kazakhstan's invention, and this complies with international practice. A number of developed European countries have positive experience of registration of religious organizations.

2. POLICY OF PROVIDING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN KAZAKHSTAN

2.1. REGULATORY AND LEGAL BASIS OF PROVIDING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

During the recent years legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan pertaining to protection of citizens' rights and freedoms went through significant changes towards improvement and adjustment to changing social and political conditions. At this stage, it is basically in line with the universally-acknowledged international standards enshrined in the Universal Human Rights Declaration and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

First and foremost, the rights and freedoms are guaranteed in article 18 of the Universal Human Rights Declaration passed by the UN in 1948. It reads: "everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion", and article 29 which allows only such limitations of human rights and freedoms as "are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society".

Pursuant to article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights ratified by the Republic of Kazakhstan November 28, 2005, everyone has the right to freedom of conscience and religion, no one shall be subject to coercion which would impair his freedom to have or to adopt a religion or belief of his choice. At the same time, this article of the Covenant allows certain restrictions of the freedom to practice religion or belief, but these shall only be such as are provided

by law and are necessary for the protection of national security, public order, health or morals as well as respect of basic rights and freedoms of others.

Under paragraph 1, article 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan the Republic of Kazakhstan asserts itself as a democratic, secular, rule-of-law state with its highest priorities being a person, his life, rights and freedoms.

The Constitution guarantees every person the freedom of conscience and religion, and it also bans any forms of discrimination based on religious, ethnic or other factors.

Pursuant to article 14 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, “everyone shall be equal before the law and court. No one shall be subject to any discrimination for reasons of origin, social, property status, occupation, sex, race, ethnicity, language, attitude to religion, convictions, place of residence or any other circumstances”.

Article 22 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan clearly establishes that “everyone shall have the right to the freedom of conscience”. The freedom of conscience is one of the basic individual rights meaning, first and foremost, a person’s freedom from any ideological control, everyone’s right to a free choice of his system of moral values. Freedom of conscience is an absolute human right and shall not be subject to any restrictions under any circumstances.

These general principles are specified in a set of legislative acts which ensure a person’s right to religious freedom and which regulate operation of religious organizations in the country.

The right to religious freedom is implemented through the October 11, 2011 Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan “On Religious Activity and Religious Associations” aimed at ensuring the constitutional principles of religious freedom through achievement of a balance between public and religious interests as well as the development of partnership relations and understanding between the government and religious organizations.

It should be noted, that with recognition of the special role of the Hanafi school of Islam and the Orthodox Christianity in the history of Kazakhstan, the Law pays respect to other faiths as well. It does not grant any legal advantages to any faith.

That law is first of all aimed at regulation of the legal field of operation of religious organizations and foreign missionaries. In drafting the law, the experience and practice of a number of developed countries of the world, the legislative basis of secular European states were studied, and international agreements ratified by Kazakhstan were taken into account. Prominent human rights experts, international scholars, lawyers, representatives of religious and non-governmental organizations were involved in drafting the law.

The fact that religious freedom exists in the country finds its full confirmation in article three of the Law which states that hindrance to lawful religious activities, infringement on individuals’ civil rights based on their attitude to religion or injuring of their religious feelings, desecration of items, buildings or places worshipped by the followers of this or that faith shall be banned. Everyone has the right to follow religious or other convictions, disseminate them, participate in activities of religious organizations and engage in missionary activities in accordance with legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

At the same time, the Law underscores that no one has the right to refuse from performance of duties established in the Constitution and laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan because of his religious convictions.

Paragraph eight, article three of the Law specifies the role of the government in relations between the government and religious communities. It introduces the principle of non-interference of the government into activities of religious organizations. It guarantees the constitutional right to freedom of conscience and religion, and provides for interaction between the government and religious communities on a legal basis.

The government does not interfere in citizens' determination of their attitude to religion and religious affiliation.

Under the country's Constitution and legislation, Kazakhstan is a secular state. In Kazakhstan, the state's secular nature and separation of religious organizations from the state mean that religious organizations do not interfere in state affairs, do not perform any government functions and do not engage in political activities. It is illegal to set up political parties on a religious basis. The practice of religious rites, ceremonies or other actions related to religion cannot be held in government offices or be a part of government activities.

The government respects internal regulations of religious organizations and provides the opportunity for them to act in accordance with those regulations; it recognizes their right to organize and administer pursuant to religious rules and standards including their right to appoint, elect or invite religious clergymen.

Legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan is not related to religious norms and is not determined by them although it takes their universal humanistic nature into account. Religious organizations' acts cannot serve as source of law in Kazakhstan. The country's judicial system is also free from the influence of religion; it does not comprise any element of religious organizations' jurisdiction.

The government facilitates implementation of citizens' and religious organizations' rights pertaining to the exercise of religion, religious education, use of buildings, of items of religious cult and religious literature, collection of donations, establishment and maintenance of contacts with co-adherents inside the country and abroad.

It is important to note that the aforementioned understanding of the principle of separation of religious organizations from the state does not mean that religious organizations and believers are excluded from social life. The state considers that believers are full-fledged citizens of Kazakhstan, and religious organizations and believers perform socially useful work: charity, cultural, educational and humanitarian work, and it cooperates with them in performance of such actions. Moreover, the government strives to engage religious organizations in addressing social problems: alcohol and drug addiction, prevention of crimes, development of healthy life style, strengthening of the family, and creation of a high spiritual and moral climate in the society.

Without extension of direct funding to religious organizations, the government can render assistance in reconstruction, renovation of religious buildings, mainly those which present cultural and historic value. It is banned to hold religious events in government buildings but the government makes it possible to exercise the right to religious freedom in separate state organizations the specific nature of which hinders the practice of religion: in prisons, detention facilities, military units, medical facilities.

The government ensures the secular nature of education in public or other educational institutions.

With recognition of non-interference in internal affairs of religious organizations and the right to religious autonomy, the government reserves the right to respond to actions of believers and religious organizations in incidents of infringement on legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan, infliction of damage to interests of citizens, organizations or the state in general. However, such response can be made only based on the law and with observance of all necessary legal procedures. Thus, religious organizations and the government are autonomous, each in its area (respectively, in administering religious ceremonies and implementation of government power); they do not interfere in one another's affairs but, at the same time, they have some common objectives, the solutions of which imply cooperation.

The Law provides for the right to hold (administer) religious services, religious rites, ceremonies and (or) meetings without any hindrance in religious buildings (facilities) and in designated areas, in places of worshipping, in institutions and facilities of religious organizations, in cemeteries, crematoria, houses, public catering facilities if needed, provided the rights and interests of people who live nearby are observed.

In order to satisfy religious needs and based on their common interests, citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, foreigners and stateless persons can found religious organizations without hindrance pursuant to the procedures set in legislative acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan. In this regard, all faiths and religious organizations are equal before the law. No religion can be declared national or mandatory.

Accordingly, registration requirements are the same for all religious organizations. The registration procedure does not involve any impassable commitments for religious organizations or persons engaged in missionary activities; it only involves certain recording, structuring and systematization of the country's respective religious space.

Registration of religious organizations is determined by the need to protect the basis of the constitutional set-up, morale, health, rights and legal interests of a person and citizen, to ensure the state's and society's security with observance of the principle of religious freedom.

Besides, pursuant to article 20 of the Law, religious organizations have the right to own property purchased or produced on their own financial means, donated by citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, foreigners, stateless persons, organizations, or obtained on other grounds which do not contradict the laws of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

It should be noted that citizens can practice any religion without registration. Any citizen can believe in God, pray, exercise different rituals individually without registration. However, dissemination of their faith and involvement of others into it can only be performed after a relevant religious organization is registered.

In accord with their charters, national and regional religious organizations have the right to establish religious educational organizations in the form of institution.

With the account of the fact that the system of education in the Republic of Kazakhstan is separated from religion and religious organizations, and has secular nature, the afore-mentioned right to establish religious educational institutions indicates that the government opens opportunities for implementation of professional religious educational programs to train clergymen, specialists, teachers in religious educational institutions of various types and levels.

With the account of one of the recommendations of the Council of Europe that religious educational programs should be examined which implies examination of religious literature as well, the new Law sets a requirement according to which religious literature, other informational materials of religious content except those intended for personal use should be brought in the country by registered religious organizations after they receive a positive evaluation of a relevant religious experts' body.

The requirements established by the Law are the same for all. Their observance makes it possible to implement the rights and freedoms of religious associations and citizens to import and disseminate literature and materials.

The Law regulates missionary activities in Kazakhstan. All the necessary conditions for Kazakhstan's registered religious organizations to invite foreign missionaries into the country and for their religious activities have been established.

The Law defines missionary activities as "activities of citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, foreigners, stateless persons who act on behalf of religious organizations registered in the Republic of Kazakhstan with the purpose of dissemination of a religious teaching in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan".

The legislation streamlines the procedures which make it possible for citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, foreigners and stateless persons to freely disseminate religion in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Law regulates the mechanism for missionary activities but does not restrict religious organizations' rights to disseminate their religious teachings. After adoption of the law, a regulatory legal act spelled out the procedure and determined a clear mechanism for registration (re-registration) of persons engaged in missionary activities.

Any citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, foreigners and stateless persons can engage in missionary activities in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan after they pass relevant registration. For registration, missionaries file only legal constitutive documents and documents certifying their affiliation with a certain religious organization.

Kazakhstan's legislation provides for an entry "missionary" visa which is issued on the basis of an invitation of a religious organization registered in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan, in coordination with the authorized government agency responsible for government regulation in the area of religious activities. The visa is for single, double, or multiple entry and exit from the country.

Pursuant to article 39 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan, provisions of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and other ratified international legal instruments in human rights area, the "missionary" visa can be extended without missionary's departure from the country.

Citizens of the Republic of Kazakhstan, foreigners and stateless persons who filed documents for registration as missionaries can be denied registration only in incidents if their missionary activities present threat to the constitutional set-up, to public order, human rights and freedoms, health and morals of population.

The requirements of the Law are designed to ensure the national security, protection of citizens' rights and freedoms, and they comply with the principles and basic concepts set in article 29 of the Universal Human Rights Declaration (1948) which states that in the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined solely by law.

It should be noted that the Republic of Kazakhstan's Code on Administrative Offenses (RK CAO) determines the degree of public danger and measures of responsibility for violation of the requirements set in legislation, but it does not limit citizens' rights and freedoms to practice religion.

The measures of responsibility set in the RK CAO for violation of the requirements of the Law are based first and foremost on the RK Constitution's fundamental norm which reads that "the Republic of Kazakhstan maintains itself as a rule-of-law state".

The major principle of a state governed by law is the principle of the rule of law which extends to all areas of public life and is the highest form of organization and protection of a person's freedom. It means that all government organs, religious organizations, government officials and citizens should act on the basis, in accord and with the purpose of implementation of laws. Accordingly, measures applied for violation of the Law shall be extended to the equal extent to all participants of legal relations in the area of religious activities.

The judicial power is exercised on behalf of the Republic of Kazakhstan and is designed to protect the rights, freedoms and legal interests of citizens and organizations, provide for implementation of the Constitution, laws, other regulatory legal acts, international agreements. Judicial protection against any unlawful decisions or actions of the government, organizations, officials or other people infringing or limiting the rights and legal interests established in the Constitution and the country's laws is guaranteed to everyone irrespective of social, ethnic, tribal, racial or religious affiliation. Nobody shall be deprived of the right to consideration of his case by a competent, independent and impartial court with observance of all requirements of the law and justice.

As a whole, the state policy pertaining to religion is a natural combination of implementation of constitutional principles of the freedom of conscience and all faiths' equality before the law and provision of the interests of national security.

Besides the Law, at this stage, there are 13 regulatory legal acts which regulate various issues of religious activities, specifically, those pertaining to religious experts' analysis, dissemination of religious literature, practice of missionary activities, construction of religious buildings.

These legal documents let the government organs cooperate closer with entities in the religious area, consolidate the rights and mutual commitments of the government and religious organizations, set up conditions and legal tools for termination of religious organizations' and missionaries' illegal activities as well as violations committed by government organs.

As part of "Strengthening Religious Freedom in Kazakhstan" project implemented by the public foundation "Astana Center Consulting" with support of the Embassy of the United Kingdom in Kazakhstan, the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Religious Activity and Religious Associations" was analyzed from the angle of its compliance with international standards. According to experts' findings the Law complies with basic principles of international standards accepted by OSCE as well as with experience of developed democratic countries.

In general, legislation pertaining to the area of religion and religious freedom sets clear rules for performance of religious activities, aims at protection of legally functioning peaceful faiths and their followers from those who use religion for personal benefits or for dissemination of extremism and religious intolerance.

2.2. ORGANIZATIONAL AND INSTITUTIONAL BASIS OF PROVIDING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

The principal institution which puts in practice the government leadership in the area of providing inter-faith accord, citizens' rights to religious freedom, and interaction with religious associations in Kazakhstan is **the Agency for Religious Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan**.

As the central authorized government organ of the Republic of Kazakhstan the Agency was established by the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan on May 18, 2011.

Pursuant to legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan the Agency performs functions:

- of development and implementation of major directions of the state policy in the area of securing the citizens' rights to religious freedom and interaction with religious organizations;
- elaboration of proposals on improvement of Kazakhstan's legislation which regulates issues of securing the citizens' rights to religious freedom;
- performance of explanatory work on issues of state policy in the area of securing the citizens' rights to religious freedom.

The Agency is vested with functions to study and analyze development of religious situation, activities of religious associations operating in the country's territory, of missionaries, to arrange religious experts' examinations, to initiate proposals for law enforcement organs on banning activities of individuals and legal entities, including religious associations, which violate legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Agency's objectives are:

- elaboration of proposals on development of the state policy in the area of securing the citizens' rights to religious freedom and interaction with religious organizations;
- comprehensive and impartial study, generalization and analysis of processes that take place in the country in the area of implementation of the citizens' rights to religious freedom and activities of religious organizations and missionaries;
- establishment and maintenance of international relations with relevant organizations of foreign countries;
- provision of official explanations on issues pertaining to its competence.

The Agency has subordinate institutions under its jurisdiction. They are the Scientific Research and Analytical Center on Religious Issues and the International Center of Cultures and Religions.

The national government-run institution "Scientific Research and Analytical Center for Religious Issues" (SRAC) was founded January 30, 2007.

The Center's objective is scientific methodological, informational, and analytical support to operation of government organs on issues of religion.

The major subject matter of the Center's operation is to organize and conduct studies and analysis of Kazakhstan's religious situation, provide information, analytical, scientific and methodological support to operation of government organs, organizations and citizens in the sphere of relations between the state and religions; it also conducts religious experts' examination of materials.

Experts of SRAC prepare analytical papers and reports on various aspects of the religious situation in Kazakhstan and activities of religious organizations.

The SRAC provides the Agency for Religious Affairs with materials containing expert assessment of religious processes taking place in the country; it interacts with Kazakhstan's expert community, with scientific analytical centers and other organizations as well as with foreign experts and analytical organizations to exchange experience in the area of studying the religious situation.

A scientific expert panel (SEP) functions as part of the SRAC. It performs general management and coordination of the process of applied scientific research and analytical studies in the area of religion for the purpose of elaboration of forecasts and recommendations for government organs. SEP performs assessment of scientific research, sociological and analytical studies in the area of religion, prepares proposals on improvement of the quality of scientific research and analytical work in the area of religion and freedom to practice religion.

The SRAC initiates and organizes a significant number of events pertaining to experts' work with participation of the country's registered religious organizations.

It prepares scientific and explanatory publications and interviews in printed and electronic media on issues of freedom of conscience and religion.

It monitors national confessional media with a view to develop preventive measures to avoid conflicts on the inter-faith basis.

SRAC employees carry out wide informational and educational work among various groups of the population and representatives of government organs on issues of religious education and prevention of religious extremism and terrorism.

They put together methodological and reference materials designed to improve various aspects of operation of national and local government organs in the area of religion and to promote religious freedom.

SRAC experts conduct professional theological analysis of literature and other materials of religious organizations from the angle of their compliance with the country's legislation.

In 2012, SRAC prepared a Commentary to the Republic of Kazakhstan's Law "On Religious Activity and Religious Associations" with explanation of the Law's basic provisions. The Commentary was presented successfully at the round-table on issues of implementation of the Law arranged by the OSCE Center in Astana.

In 2013, SRAC arranged several events designed to host discussion of issues of further improvement of interaction between the government and religious associations on issues of ensuring the freedom of religion and religious practice. Notably, November 25, 2013, national scientific practical conference "The State and Religious Associations: Problems and Prospects of Interaction" was held in Astana. Based on results of its work, the conference passed recommendations aimed at improvement of Kazakhstani model of relations between the government and religions, securing the observance of the citizens' rights in the area of religious freedom.

The national government-run institution "International Center of Culture and Religions" (ICCR) was established on August 28, 2008 at the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan N.A. Nazarbayev's initiative which he voiced at the second Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions in 2006 in Astana.

The subject matter and objective of the ICCR operation is the study of historic and socio-political information pertaining to religion and culture on the basis of comprehensive collection, systematization, research and popularization of materials concerning the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan and its leader – President Nazarbayev pursued in the area of inter-faith and inter-confession accord.

Speaking at the third Congress of World and Traditional Religious Leaders in 2009 President Nazarbayev posed a global task for the ICCR: to turn into an intellectual laboratory of peace, accord and justice, to elaborate and initiate proposals for the global agenda. He designated the ICCR as the Congress' working organ under whose aegis the dialogue between representatives of various cultures and faiths should be expanded, and representatives of secular and religious media, youth and women organizations, scientific and creative intellectuals should be involved into the dialogue.

During five years of its operation the ICCR was directly involved in work on arrangement of the third and fourth Congresses of World and Traditional Religious Leaders, in preparation and holding of four meetings of the Secretariat and several meetings of the Congress' working groups.

The ICCR has initiated and organized a big number of events with involvement of the country's registered religious associations.

The ICCR conducts comprehensive work on examination and analysis of the religious situation outside Kazakhstan; it also arranges social studies of public opinion designed to develop recommendations on improvement of the state policy in the area of inter-faith relations. It also puts together various analytical, reference and methodological materials on those issues.

Experts of the ICCR conduct professional theological examination of literature and other materials of religious organizations and Internet sites to check if they comply with the country's legislation.

The Center monitors and analyzes Kazakhstani and foreign media on issues of inter-faith relations. The Methodological Council functions under the ICCR to cover the topic of religion in media. The Methodological Council organizes regular meetings with representatives of the pool of journalists and provides workshops and training for journalists on issues of professional coverage of complicated issues in religious area. In 2013, the Council held a number of meetings with representatives of media, religious associations, religious scholars on the following topics: Basic Principles of Covering Religious Topics in Media, Effectiveness of Legislation in Religious Area, State Policy in the Area of Religion and Religious Freedom.

Local government organs on issues of religious activity and interaction with religious organizations represented by regional offices for religious affairs under the governments of provinces, cities of Astana and Almaty also participate in implementation of the state policy in the area of religion and promotion of religious freedom.

In particular, they:

- 1) Study and analyze the religious situation in the region;
- 2) Implement the state policy in the area of religious activity;
- 3) Submit to the Agency proposals on improvement of legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activity and religious organizations;

- 4) Submit proposals to law enforcement organs on banning activities of individuals and legal entities for violation of legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activity and religious organizations;
- 5) Review complaints of individuals and legal entities pertaining to violation of legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activity and religious organizations;
- 6) Perform explanatory work at the local level on issues pertaining to their competence;
- 7) Approve location of designated permanent premises for dissemination of religious literature and other information materials of religious content, of religious products; they also approve location of premises for religious events held outside religious buildings (facilities);
- 8) Make decisions on construction of religious buildings(facilities), determination of their location, and on conversion (change of functional designation) of buildings (facilities) to religious buildings (facilities);
- 9) Arrange examination of lists of citizens who initiated establishment of religious organizations;
- 10) Hold registration of persons engaged in missionary activities.

The Council for Relations with Religious Organizations functions under the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Council is a consultative-advisory organ.

The Council's goal is the development of proposals and recommendations on issues of shaping and implementation of major directions of the state policy in the area of religious activity and interaction with religious organizations, strengthening of religious accord in the society and harmonization of inter-faith relations.

The Council's major objectives are:

- Comprehensive and impartial study, generalization and analysis of the country's religious situation and tendencies in its development;
- Elaboration of proposals on development of the state policy's priority directions in the area of religious activity and interaction with religious organizations;
- Informing government organs of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the status of the country's religious situation and observance of legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activity and religious organizations;
- Coordination of operation of regional Councils for Relations with Religious Organizations;
- Consolidation of mutual understanding and tolerance between religious organizations and extension of consultative assistance to them in accord with legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The Council's working organ is the RK Agency for Religious Affairs. The Council carries out its work in interaction with government organs, religious and other public organizations of the country as well as with international organizations. The Council's decisions are non-binding recommendations.

The Council's members are leaders of prominent faiths, religious scholars, employees of government organs and social leaders of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Council members perform their duties on a pro bono basis.

In accordance with the objectives imposed on the Council, it performs the following functions:

- Participates in development of major directions of the state policy in the area of religious activity and interaction with religious organizations;
- Elaborates proposals on improvement of legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan on religious activity and religious organizations;
- Performs consultative work on issues of the state policy in the area of religious activity and interaction with religious organizations;
- Establishes and maintains international relations with relevant organizations of foreign countries.

The Consultative Expert Council on Issues of Religious Situation in Kazakhstan) is a standing consultative expert organ under the Agency for Religious Affairs.

The Council's goal is to elaborate on proposals and recommendations regarding religious issues in Kazakhstan with the account of opinions of prominent experts and scholars in the area of religious studies, political, social science, philosophy, cultural studies, jurisprudence, of representatives of government and non-governmental organizations.

The Council's principal objectives are:

- Assessment of the religious situation in the Republic of Kazakhstan;
- Elaboration of proposals on issues of the government regulation of religious activity.

The Council performs the following functions:

- Initiates proposals on issues of government regulation of religious activity and improvement of legislation pertaining to religious activity;
- Interacts with foreign experts and international organizations to exchange experience in the area of studying the religious situation.

The Council members are prominent experts and scholars working in the area of religious studies, political, social sciences, philosophy, cultural studies, jurisprudence, representatives of government and non-governmental organizations.

Public Association “Congress of Religious Scholars” The goal of the Congress is an in-depth study of the ways and conditions of interaction of religion and society, religion and government as well as the elaboration of proposals on consolidation of the country's national security.

Principal directions of the Congress' activity are:

- Engagement in research projects to study the religious situation at the national and regional levels;
- Building a database of experts in the area of religion;
- Organization of interaction between government organs, religious organizations and expert community;
- Engagement of religious experts in basic and advanced training of the staff of government organs and schools (offer special courses, hold workshops, trainings, conferences);
- Study the experience of teaching religious studies in high schools and universities;
- Arrangement of events of an informational and educational nature.

At this stage, more than 160 prominent religion scholars, theologians, Islamic studies scholars and scholars from all regions of Kazakhstan are members of the Congress.

The Congress is directly engaged in the process of expert examination of religious organizations' literature and of literature intended for religious purposes.

In the process of examination, religious experts check whether materials contain:

- Calls aimed at instigation of social, racial, inter-ethnic and inter-faith discord;
- Signs of religious, political or ethnic extremism and terrorism;
- Signs of infringement on the rights, freedoms and legal interests of a person and citizen regarding his social, racial, ethnic, religious or lingual affiliation, or attitude to religion.

The Congress of Religious Scholars takes an active part in arranging and holding the annual Forum of Religious Scholars of Kazakhstan.

The Congress has informational and educational Internet portal “E-Islam” designed to satisfy cognitive, spiritual and religious needs of Muslims and all those who are interested in issues of Islam.

Members of the Congress offer regular lectures designed to raise religious literacy of population; they take part in events on counteraction and prevention of religious extremism and terrorism.

The Council for Interaction with Non-governmental Organizations under the Agency for Religious Affairs

The goal of the Council is to engage the non-governmental sector and civil institutions in the implementation of the state policy in the area of religion and religious freedom including issues of development of harmonious inter-faith relations, tolerant mind, social peace and accord.

The Council incorporates more than 40 NGOs representing the civil sector and specializing, among other things, in the settlement of issues pertaining to the religious arena.

Its members include 28 NGOs directly rendering various services in the area of religious relations. Six of those NGOs specialize in comprehensive rehabilitation assistance to citizens affected by ideological influence of radical religious groups. 22 centers extend consultative and psychological assistance to individuals who suffered from destructive religious organizations and trends.

14 centers are members of the union of legal entities “Association of Assistance Centers for Victims of Destructive Religious Sects”, and eight centers extend services independently.

A significant number of NGOs perform informational and educational work and extend psychological, theological and legal assistance in the form of individual conversations, group meetings, lectures, workshops, trainings, round-tables, and conferences. Those events are organized with target groups and embrace a significant number of people.

It should be noted that Kazakhstan, as well as Europe, has experienced a significant growth of the number of incidents when harm was inflicted to citizens’ health and lives as a result of actions of various sects and religious organizations.

The demand in activity of such NGOs is indicated by the growing number of people who seek consultative assistance in various situations related to negative consequences of their involvement in activities of various entities in religious relations.

In general, there is a noticeable tendency towards the growth of the volume of the work done by the centers. For example, if in 2011, the total number of individuals who received consultative assistance was less than one thousand people (780 people), in 2012, the number of complaints amounted to 1916, in 2013 – to 2008. The tendency towards the growth of the number of citizens’ complaints goes up.

In this regard, the flow of citizens' claims filed with the Human Rights Commission and the Ombudsman seeking protection of their fundamental rights and freedoms from the annoying missionary activities of various religious groups has grown.

The following NGOs can be highlighted among the current NGOs which work in the form of centers for extension of consultative and psychological assistance to people who suffered from destructive religious sects and rehabilitation centers: the Association of Assistance Centers for Victims of Destructive Religious Sects, consultative and rehabilitation center "Ansar", Informational and consultative religious studies center "Sana", Center for socio-psychological and legal assistance for victims of destructive sects "Victoria", and Center of social initiatives.

Activities of all assistance centers for those who suffered from destructive religious sects and of rehabilitation centers is directed at extension of help to victims of destructive religious sects of various faiths through combined efforts of psychologists, theologians, religion scholars, and lawyers.

Some centers do not restrict their activities to issues of rendering assistance and rehabilitation in religious area. Along with that they provide assistance in settlement of social and every-day life problems of those who are in need. An example of such NGOs is Crisis center "Kamkorlyk" for people who suffered from infringement on their rights and freedoms by religious extremism and for persons who overcame the influence of religious extremist organizations in Kzylorda province.

A number of NGOs, including public foundation "Informational Consultative Group "Perspectiva" in Almaty, specialize in dissemination of truthful information on the destructive impact on a person of some groups of people and organizations whose activity violates the citizens' rights, undermines the status of their physical and social health, contradicts the Constitution and the legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Activity of such NGOs complies with the January 27, 2012 recommendations of the Council of Europe on the need "to establish national or regional information centers on groups of religious, esoteric or spiritual nature", as well as recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly "On Illegal Activities of Sects" (#1412 of 1999) and "On Sects and New Religious Movements" (#1178 of 1992). Herein, the relevant Recommendations are aimed at "protection from attacks of sects and non-traditional religious groups on citizens' fundamental freedoms, particularly in the area of healthcare, education as well as respect to private and family life".

Consultative-Advisory Body under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan (CAB)

CAB consists of the representatives of state bodies, some political parties, members of the Parliament of RK, representatives of NGOs and international experts of human dimension.

In 2013 there were held six sectoral meetings of the CAB which resulted in the evolvement of 157 recommendations on the issues of democracy development, facilitation of rule of law and of the human rights. These recommendations are meant for the further work with the Government and Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan. All recommendations were produced in line with the priorities of Kazakhstan's political development, as well as with the country's international commitments in the field of human rights and democracy. Over half of recommendations are being taken into account by the state bodies and the Parliament in their further work with NGOs-members of the CAB.

On 20 November 2013 there was held a thematic CAB meeting devoted to the topic:

“Facilitation of human rights and freedoms: right on freedom of expression, conscience and religion”. The representatives of NGOs and corresponding state bodies have held constructive discussions on the issues of implementation by Kazakhstan of its international commitments in the field of freedom of conscience and religion.

The concluding CAD meeting for 2013 was held under the chairmanship of Foreign Minister Erlan Idrissov on the sidelines of which there were discussed the results of CAB’s work in 2013 and were identified the future prospects of activity of this Body.

Within the adopted work plan for 2014 there are envisaged meetings on a quarterly bases on the following:

- Commencement of the mechanism of practical implementation of agreed CAB recommendations;
- Discussion of additional issues of Kazakhstan’s political development;
- Elaboration and enhancement of the channels of cooperation of CAD with the state bodies and Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan on the improvement of the national legislation.

In general Minister Idrissov welcomed the results of the one year’s joint work of the representatives of state bodies, court, Parliament and civil society.

There is being formed a new culture of interaction between the CAB members based on the ability to listen and to hear each other. This culture would allow all participants of the political process of the country to jointly facilitate further steady and consistent development of Kazakhstan, as well as enhance effectiveness of CAB in 2014.

2.3. KAZAKHSTAN’S INTERNATIONAL INITIATIVES IN THE AREA OF PROVIDING INTER-FAITH ACCORD

After gaining its sovereignty the Republic of Kazakhstan joined a number of international organizations such as the UN as well as OSCE, OIC, CIS, SCO, CSTO and others.

March 2, 1992, based on results of the 46th session of the United Nation’s General Assembly the organization unanimously passed resolution 46/224 to accept the Republic of Kazakhstan as member of UN. At the present time, 15 offices of UN work effectively in various areas of life in Kazakhstan.

The Republic of Kazakhstan has established diplomatic relations with more than 139 countries and opened over 80 missions abroad. And, on their part, diplomats from more than 100 foreign countries and representatives of regional and international organizations are accredited in Kazakhstan; 44 of them work in conjunction with other duties.

With the account of the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional structure of population, Kazakhstan came up with a number of constructive international initiatives and supported progressive ideas of other countries’ leaders aimed at strengthening peace and stability, dialogue between cultures and faiths both inside the country and in the international area.

The ideas of tolerance and peace, cooperation of civilizations became the keynote of Kazakhstan’s biggest foreign policy initiatives and have significant importance in keeping peace and stability in Central Asia and the Eurasian continent.

The fact that Kazakhstan was trusted with chairing the biggest international organizations of Europe and Muslim world – OSCE and OIC – is an indication of the high assessment given by the world community to Kazakhstan’s model of maintenance of inter-ethnic and inter-faith accord.

The Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions

The Congress of leaders of world and traditional religions occupies an important place in the ranks of peacekeeping institutions.

At the initiative of President Nursultan Nazarbayev, Congresses of leaders of world and traditional religions are held every three years in the capital of Kazakhstan Astana. The first Congress was held September 23-24, 2003, the second Congress on September 12-13, 2006, the third – July 1-2, 2009 and fourth Congress – May 30-31, 2012.

Leaders of largest religions of the world, prominent politicians and representatives of international organizations attended the inter-faith forums. Envoys of Islam, Orthodox Christianity, Catholicism, Protestantism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Judaism, and other faiths accepted invitation of Kazakhstan's leader.

The congresses of leaders of world and traditional religions held in Kazakhstan are the country's concrete input into development of a dialogue of cultures and civilizations as one of the mechanisms for maintenance of global and regional security.

The idea of inter-faith dialogue has won wide support and development during these years. In 2003, the first Congress was attended by 17 delegations, in 2006, 43 delegations from 20 countries participated in the forum, in 2009 – 77 delegations from 35 countries, in 2012, 85 delegations from 40 countries of the world took part in the congress.

The Congresses' important feature is involvement in their work of prominent politicians, heads of states and powerful international organizations along with representatives of all the largest faiths of the world. It is instrumental in making efficient decisions which can directly impact the strengthening of security in the world, bringing cultures and civilizations closer together.

The circle of powerful international institutions represented at the Forum expands. It includes the United Nations (UN), Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Alliance of Civilizations.

Representatives of new religions join the work of the Congress; so do representatives of clergy from countries which did not attend the Congress in the past (Indonesia, Pakistan, Palestine, Brazil).

The work of the Congress opens opportunities for joint discussion and settlement of acute problems which emerged on the religious basis, for a dialogue of religions and cultures of different peoples, for an exchange of experience and fostering the spirit of religious tolerance, development of a positive image of peaceful faiths.

In addition to that, the meetings of the leaders of world and traditional religions open wide prospects for the ways to overcome violence, religious fanaticism, extremism and terrorism. They show to people that religious extremism and terrorism do not have religious background. Religious teachings of world faiths reject fanaticism, violence and intolerance, whereas those who cover their anti-humane actions by religious slogans commit crime against faith.

Organization of peaceful co-existence of various faiths has become the principal topic of forums of religious leaders in Kazakhstan.

The work of the first Congress touched upon problems of religious and political extremism and terrorism, conflicts and discrimination based on religion, lawlessness and violence.

Based on the results of the forum religious leaders came to common opinion that we need to improve inter-faith harmony, perception of mutual values, overcome hatred, animosity, intolerance and xenophobia, put together educational programs and social communication means to promote positive approaches to religion and cultures. In conclusion, the Congress passed the Declaration on joint actions to ensure integrity of peace, secure stability and progress for mankind in future.

The first Congress turned into an extraordinary and memorable event which showed to the world the timeliness and the need to put into practice the ideas of cooperation and unification of representatives of various faiths for the sake of peaceful and decent life of people throughout the world. The Congress' idea was supported by such prominent public figures and politicians as Kofi Annan, George Bush, Margaret Thatcher, Jiang Zemin, Nelson Mandella, Giscard d'Estaing, and others.

The second Congress was held under the general topic of "Religion, Society and International Security". It passed the Principles of Inter-Faith Dialogue shared by the participants. The final document of the Second Congress reflected concisely the need to replace "the ideology of confrontation" with "culture of peace".

The third Congress was held under the title "The Role of Religious Leaders in Building the World Based on Tolerance, Mutual Respect and Cooperation" with participation and technical assistance of the UN. The Congress discussed such important issues as "Moral and Spiritual Values, the World Ethics", "Dialogue and Cooperation", "Solidarity, Especially in Times of Crises".

The fourth Congress was entitled "Peace and Accord as a Choice of Humankind". The specific feature of the content of that forum was arrangement of four panel sessions on the pressing topics of contemporary society: the Role of religious leaders in achievement of stable development, Religion and multiculturalism, Religion and women: spiritual values and current challenges, Religion and youth. The Congress also established its Council of Religious Leaders.

The 2013 events arranged as part of celebration of the 10-year anniversary of convocation of the First Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions were a significant input in sharing the experience of the Congress with international community. Events with presentations on the Congress' experience were held in 10 countries of the world.

In general, Kazakhstan's input into development of the global inter-faith dialogue elevated its prestige in the community of nations. Astana turned into the Congress' permanent site for dialogue, and it found its niche in the area of global inter-faith dialogue. In international structures, Kazakhstan is distinguished for its integration initiatives and also as a country with the dynamically growing economy and a society which is consolidated on the basis of mutual understanding and respect to people of different ethnicities and faiths.

During 22 years of its independent development Kazakhstan has won recognition and trust in world politics rigorously following the principles of the UN Charter. It became a reliable partner of the whole world community.

Kazakhstan and OSCE

The Republic of Kazakhstan joined the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in January 1992.

The country's participation in the distinguished international organization CSCE (OSCE) confirms Kazakhstan's aspiration to fight for peace and security not in Europe only, but in other parts of the world as well.

Heads of many OSCE member-countries assessed highly Kazakhstan's role and input into the cause of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. They stated their further support of the country's policy in that area.

In the area of mutual cooperation with OSCE Kazakhstan first and foremost strives to keep peace in Central Asia and ensure regional security through its joint efforts with OSCE.

One of the most important events in the international arena was Kazakhstan's 2010 Chairmanship in the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. During its chairmanship, Kazakhstan achieved a number of significant results. The most important of those was the OSCE summit held after an 11-year pause in Kazakhstan's capital Astana. Heads of many states and governments saw with their own eyes Kazakhstan's achievements in all areas of human development.

The motto of Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship was four "T's": trust, tradition, transparency, tolerance. With that, tolerance which reflects the importance of strengthening the dialogue between cultures, religions and civilizations for Kazakhstan turned into one of the most important components of Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship.

As the President of Kazakhstan underscored in his article "the Future and Prospects of OSCE": "Kazakhstan, as a multi-ethnic and multi-faith country committed to ideas of inter-cultural and inter-civilization dialogue, intends to use the organization's quite powerful capacity to cope effectively with nationalism, religious intolerance, racism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism".

Kazakhstan and OIC

In the development of its relations with Arab countries of the world, in 1995, Kazakhstan joined the Organization of Islamic Conference which incorporates 57 leading Islamic countries. The majority of them are secular states.

Due to its successful development Kazakhstan was granted the right to chair the OIC in 2011, and June 28 that year, the 38th session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (CFM) of the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) was held in Kazakhstan.

Chairing the OIC, Kazakhstan made efforts to add into the agenda such topical issues as political and humanitarian cooperation, combat against terrorism, religious intolerance and gender inequality. It is symbolic that it was in Kazakhstan that the meeting of the OIC CFM issued a decision to rename OIC into the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, and it also approved the organization's new logo.

Kazakhstan's active participation in OIC activities along with other large regional and world organizations sets conditions for discussion and adoption of important decisions on issues of securing inter-faith peace and accord as well as the dialogue of cultures and faiths in the international arena.

Kazakhstan and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA)

At the 47 Session of the UN General Assembly in 1992, President Nazarbayev advanced an initiative on holding a Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

Kazakhstani leader's proposal was widely supported by Asian and European countries which pre-determined the high level of effectiveness of its implementation. At that point, Asia did not have any continental organization to address the afore-mentioned problems and to promote ideas of peace, security and stability.

Kazakhstan proposed the establishment of an international forum which would unite countries of the Asian continent and set itself a goal of strengthening mutual understanding and cooperation between Asian countries in ensuring stability and security in the region.

Currently, CICA has 24 member-states and turned into an important factor of contemporary international relations as well as an effective pan-Asian site for discussions on a wide range of issues of cooperation. CICA obtained the status of observer at UN (November 12, 2007) which indicates recognition of CICA's high importance in the cause of ensuring security and cooperation between countries and cultures.

At this stage, Kazakhstan turns into "a bridge" between East and West. It raises issues of establishment of principles of a dialogue between faiths and civilizations in the global scale. The country's model of inter-ethnic and inter-faith accord has won the world recognition.

Kazakhstan and the Alliance of Civilizations

The Alliance of Civilizations was established for the purpose of uniting the international community's efforts to prevent further splits between the West and the Muslim world, to overcome religious prejudices and polarization of civilizations and to encourage governments to take adequate measures in the global scale.

At this stage, the Alliance carries out its activity as part of the United Nations Organization, and is one of the leading sites for arrangement of inter-cultural dialogue in the world.

Kazakhstan and the Alliance are partners in issues of promotion of peaceful initiatives for the sake of dialogue between civilizations. Cooperation between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Alliance of Civilizations began when Kazakhstan joined the Alliance's Group of Friends in November, 2005.

Kazakhstan's experience in keeping the inter-faith accord and tolerance in multi-faith country and holding the world and traditional religious leaders' congresses is useful for the Alliance.

In this regard, at a briefing on the results of his meeting with the Austrian Republic's Federal President H. Fisher, President Nazarbayev voiced a proposal on a possible merger of the Alliance and the Congress of world and traditional religious leaders. "Kazakhstan is a multi-ethnic and multi-faith country. 130 ethnic groups and peoples live in friendship and accord in our country. And it is not accidental that our country has already hosted four Congresses of world and traditional religious leaders. Austria, in its turn, is a participant of the Alliance of Civilizations. We could merge those two forums to work not for the clash of civilizations but for seeking a consensus between different cultures"

The Congress of world and traditional religious leaders pursue goals and objectives identical to those of the Alliance of Civilizations:

- Consolidation of constructive dialogue between civilizations, faiths, countries and peoples on the basis of common interests and accurate information about each other, opening of wide opportunities for mutual cooperation and overcoming such negative phenomena of our times as violence, fanaticism, extremism and terrorism;
- Consolidation of security and stability in the region by an active member of the Alliance's Group of Friends;
- Designation of inter-faith accord as first priority which, in its turn, is one of the key ways of public development and improvement of all peoples' well-being;
- Development and elaboration of mutually beneficial, mutually interesting proposals and directions which will serve the maintenance of peace and accord, tolerance and strengthening of inter-faith relations in the world;
- Coordination and expansion of cooperation between world organizations and forums;
- Support and further development of President Nazarbayev's initiative on hosting the religious forum – the Congress of world and traditional religious leaders;
- Sharing the Kazakhstani experience in inter-faith accord with the Alliance of Civilizations;
- Fruitful cooperation in the area of experience in arrangement of inter-cultural dialogue in following and implementing the Millennium Development Goals.

2.4. COOPERATION WITH HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS ON ISSUES OF OBSERVING THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Having declared a person, his life and rights as the highest value of the society and the state, Kazakhstan considers that it is necessary and is quite realistic that the country should enter the legal field of international legal acts in the area of human rights stage by stage.

Constitutional norms determine a person's specific place in the system of public relations, set the protection of his rights and interests as the principle which works in the society and the state. The Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Religious Activity and Religious Associations" enshrines the responsibility of the state and its government organs to create necessary legal and organizational conditions for implementation of citizens' rights, freedoms and interests.

In line with international standards, Kazakhstan has developed an effectively functioning national system for protection of human rights. The key elements of the national human rights system are the Human Rights Commission under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan and the institute of the Human Rights Commissioner of the Republic of Kazakhstan (Ombudsman).

Legal protection is an element of the exercise of human rights. Its content comprises actions of the government, public organizations and individuals aimed at creation of legal conditions which promote continuous process of implementation of human rights.

For the purpose of ensuring implementation of human rights the Agency for Religious Affairs is empowered with a number of functions including:

- Arrangements for performance of religious expert analysis;
- Consideration of complaints of individuals and legal entities pertaining to violation of legislation in the area of religious activity;

- Arrangements for reach-out campaigns with explanations on religious issues.

These functions are designed first and foremost to protect human rights from moral, psychological, material harm resulting from destructive activity of pseudo-religious sects. On appeal to the Agency, a citizen receives response with observance of the principle of equality, rule of law and complete consideration of human rights and freedoms. Thus, at present time, operation of the Agency improves significantly the level of effective protection of human rights and freedoms.

In order to consult and receive complaints of citizens and organizations on all issues pertaining to religious area, and to extend psychological assistance to victims of destructive religious activity, the Agency set up and runs a round-the-clock free hotline – 114.

The Agency interacts actively with representatives of registered religious organizations. It also creates conditions for their interaction with one another. Regular meetings and other events are held for representatives of religious associations and various human rights organizations to get consultations on issues pertaining to activity of the Agency as the authorized government organ and to application of the norms of the current legislation in the area of religion.

In this regard, discussion of problems with leaders and representatives of faiths and development of common acceptable solutions is done in the process of every-day thorough work in individual and group meetings with representatives of religious organizations.

To be more specific, during the period from 2012 and 2013, the Agency's top management held more than 100 meetings with leaders and representatives of various religious organizations. The biggest number of those meetings were with representatives of religious associations of various directions of Protestant faiths (the New Life, Evangelical Christians Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Evangelical Lutheran Church, etc.)

In general, the practice of such meetings with representatives of various religious associations has a positive impact on consolidation of relations between the state and faiths. It also creates conditions for further development of religious tolerance and inert-faith accord in the country.

In cooperation with other government organs concerned, the Agency carries out relevant work on implementation of proposals specified in par 70, 71, 72, 73, 100, 107, 112, 121 of the Report of the Universal Periodic Review working group of the UN Human Rights Council at the 14 session March 23, 2010, and in par 4, 19, 20 of Recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee as part of the report on implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights issued at the 102 session (July 11-29, 2011).

The Agency maintains persistent cooperation with the Human Rights Commissioner of the Republic of Kazakhstan whose competence includes monitoring over observance of the rights and freedoms of a person and citizen. The Ombudsman has the authority to take measures, within his competence, for restitution of infringed rights and freedoms of a person and citizen. The activities of the Ombudsman supplement the existing government tools for protection of human rights and freedoms.

The Ombudsman's influence on observance of human rights and freedoms in the religious area is to a big extent determined not just by his formal tools but by his public status in the country. It is confirmed, first of all, by letters of citizens who appeal to the Ombudsman, by requests of government organs, cooperation with non-governmental and international organizations.

The Human Rights Commissioner receives some complaints on religious issues related to actions of individuals in protection of their rights. Specifically, in 2013, he received some complaints with disagreement on imposition of administrative liability for illegal missionary activities, about restriction of believers' rights in penitentiary institutions, about biased coverage of activity of some religious associations in media, etc. For instance, representatives of Jehovah's Witnesses appealed to the Human Rights Commissioner more than once.

The analysis indicates that the afore-mentioned incidents were first of all caused by the lack of understanding of the principles of Kazakhstan's current legislation which is based on tolerance, neutrality and parity, and also aimed at keeping the fragile balance of public and religious interests.

In consideration of such complaints, the facts described in them are usually not confirmed. However, this problem needs permanent attention of the authorized government organs and the public.

Certainly, development of fundamental institutions for protection of human rights to religious freedom is inseparably associated with educational work among population for the purpose of protection from extremist religious sects.

The experience of operation of the institution of the Human Rights Commissioner shows that media can also form certain negative images in people's conscience. In some incidents, driven by the purpose of colorful coverage of problem, media presents to public unverified information which was collected from individuals who, in their opinion, fell victims to some religious groups; in this way, a biased public evaluation of religious centers is shaped.

In general, the insignificant number of complaints received by the Ombudsman on religious issues indicates that, through its legislation, our country has developed a favorable legal field for the freedom of religion and inter-faith accord. Herewith, we have no doubt that the currently built multi-level instruments for implementation of the rights to freedom of conscience will have a positive impact on development of inter-faith accord in Kazakhstan.

In the opinion of the Ombudsman's office, isolated incidents of infringement on religious freedom do not have systemic nature; they are a result of erroneous actions of individual persons and have to be addressed appropriately in the framework of legal field. In this regard, with the account of the fact that provision of peaceful co-existence of religions is an important centerpiece of security, we should use the capacity of existing state and public instruments more effectively for the purpose of observing international standards for human rights to freedom of conscience, settlement of potential conflicts in the religious area by civilized methods.

To implement its function of protection of citizens' right to religious freedom the Agency cooperates closely with human rights organizations.

The Agency is open to discussion of issues of implementation of Law "On Religious Activity and Religious Associations". In this context, four important joint events and 12 meetings of the Agency management with representatives of international human rights organizations in 2013 can be mentioned.

For example, in 2013 only, a number of meetings with representatives of national and international human rights organizations, diplomatic corps were held, specifically, with staff of the Embassy of UK in Kazakhstan, diplomats of EU countries and USA, OSCE Center in Astana,

Regional Central Asian Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (A.Harutyunyan), Chairman of the US Commission on International Religious Freedom K. Lantos Swett and others.

In all events held by the Agency it consistently explained the goal and essence of the state policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in the area of regulation of religious relations and religious freedom, discussed issues of improvement of legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan pertaining to religious activity, provided full and well-reasoned answers to posed questions.

According to a number of independent experts the Law was in general instrumental in making the country's religious situation healthier, bringing activity of religious organizations in compliance with requirements of the time.

During the meetings and in consideration of citizens' complaints, problems of involvement of minors, young people into destructive religious sects were often raised. In this regard, proposals were made on taking legislative measures to ban construction of religious buildings, premises for religious events near schools and children's educational institutions.

In this regard, relevant instructions were approved to spell out the requirements that such premises and buildings should not be located near schools, children's, and educational institutions. Requirements were set to determine that activity of religious associations which induce people to destroy family, which inflict harm on morals and health is banned.

With the account of proposals filed with the Agency, amendments were also made in the Tax Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan regarding exemption of religious products from the value added tax in importing those products into the territory of the country.

It should be noted that in its practical work the Agency relies on expert opinions, including those made by foreign specialists and international organizations. In general, the Agency for Religious Affairs receives positive opinions concerning the content of the Law and its practical application.

In the opinion of American human rights activists, the Law in general complies with basic democratic standards. However, they expressed certain concerns relating to the complaint of Jehovah's Witnesses religious group about negative assessment of some of their religious literature by experts as well as about holding some of their missionaries liable under the administrative law.

According to the results of revision of that complaint, the reason for the negative decision on the literature was an impartial evaluation made by independent experts who found texts in that literature infringing on the constitutional rights and freedoms of people. Moreover, the court of the Republic of Kazakhstan which serves to issue impartial and legal rulings, found their literature contradicting the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. As for missionary activities, representatives of that religious organization broke requirements of Law "On Religious Activity and Religious Associations" by visiting residential houses, trying to convert people to their faith without consideration of their wishes. They acted without registering as missionaries.

A number of human rights organizations expressed concern regarding the fate of Presbyterian Blagodat church's pastor B. Kashkumbayev. He is known to have initially been held liable under four articles of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Later, upon thorough examination of materials, Astana city prosecutor's office dropped some charges including accusations concerning extremism and incitement of religious hatred. It is indication of objectivity and impartiality of consideration of the pastor's case.

At this stage, the court is reviewing individual citizens', including churchgoers, complaints about infliction of harm to their health by B. Kashkumbayev. Similar incidents occur frequently in other countries as well. And no doubts emerge that the judicial system will issue impartial ruling with the account of all circumstances of the case.

It should be noted that there is no particular attitude towards the religious organization itself. Presbyterian churches which are a part of the large group of Protestant religious associations (more than 500 organizations) carry out their activity in Kazakhstan on terms equal to those of other organizations.

Human rights organizations voiced opinions that the 2011 Law imposed certain restrictions in activity of religious associations. Some earlier functioning religious associations failed to pass re-registration. However, in reality, the Law introduced new requirements which streamlined the mechanism for establishment of religious associations and missionary activities.

Religious associations that refused to submit the required information and documents to the organ of registration were not re-registered. All religious organizations which wanted to re-register in compliance with the Law could pass the required procedures without hindrances. Herewith, based on religious expert analysis of the submitted documents, some organizations were not recognized as religious associations.

The Law's relevant requirements on re-registration were prompted by the reality of present time when a number of religious groups of radical extremist nature operate secretly in the country. After terrorist attacks organized by representatives of religious extremist groups a solid public opinion formed in Kazakhstan on the need to protect the rights and health of people, to take additional measures on regulation of the procedure for religious organizations' registration and to tighten up punishment for violation of the country's legislation in the area of religion.

3. RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND MEASURES FOR PREVENTION OF RELIGIOUS EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

As a member of a number of international organizations the Republic of Kazakhstan made commitments to respect universal democratic standards in the human rights area including the right to freedom of conscience and religion. Along with that, peaceful co-existence of religions, counteraction against religious extremism are priorities in Kazakhstan's home and foreign policy.

Kazakhstani people's respect of other faiths, tolerance and mutual understanding has become a consolidating factor and the major condition for the steady development of its statehood and for securing public stability in our country.

At the same time, the contemporary world is going through serious changes because of globalization processes. The growing religious intolerance, tension, xenophobia and radicalism result in split of society, in confrontation both within individual countries and in a global scale.

Terrorism is one of the challenges of the contemporary globalizing world. In all its forms and manifestations, in its scope and intensity, in its barbarity and cruelty it has currently turned into one of the most acute and burning problems of the whole world community.

At present time, terrorist attacks occur both in rich and in poor countries. Terrorism does not depend on the living standards in various countries, nor does it depend on faith. Practically no

country evaded this virus. As of today, all countries have encountered with terrorism to certain extent, and they suffer tangible losses.

Terrorism is particularly dangerous because its ideology is often disguised and covered by religious factor, for instance, by Islam. However, there is no doubt that terrorism and Islam are fundamentally opposite and mutually exclusive phenomena.

At this stage, international terrorism and religious extremism inflict enormous harm to Islam itself, using it as an ideological shield for achievement of their goals.

A significant impact on development of the country's religious situation is exerted by the targeted propaganda of terrorism ideologists from abroad.

Analysis of Kazakhstan's religious situation also indicates that a number of alarming tendencies still exist. First of all, it is radicalization of convictions of some groups of population as a result of actions of ideologists of radicalism under the guise of Islam. It is fraught with incidents of extremism and even terrorism.

In the age of wide spread of electronic communication technologies, the Internet turns into the major means of propaganda of radical ideology. According to materials of criminal cases, the global network was the source of instigation of radical ideas, a means of coordination and provocation of aggressive actions practically in all incidents of Kazakhstani citizens' involvement in extremist and terrorist activities.

Posting their materials in the global network, international terrorist and other extremist organizations, under the guise of religious rhetoric, purposefully form radical ideas in the conscience of Kazakhstani society, push our citizens to "the armed jihad". The openness of information space and popularity of developing informational and communicational networks let extremist ideologists reach out to wide audience with their propaganda.

Proselytism has also become more active as a result of targeted missionary activities of a number of new religious groups. On the one hand, it causes tension in the society and among Kazakhstan's traditional religious associations. On the other hand, it sets conditions for radical developments.

With the account of the afore-mentioned threat, counteraction against ideology of destructive, radical and extremist movements in Kazakhstan is based on the following major principles:

- Observance of public accord and stability as the constitutional priority;
- Consolidation of inter-faith and inter-ethnic accord;
- Implementation of citizens' right to religious freedom with recognition of the fact that there is no extremism in religion.

The principal directions of the state policy in the area of religion are:

- Provision of the society's spiritual security;
- Protection of citizens' rights and freedoms;
- Prevention of the use of religion for destructive and extremist purposes.

For this purpose, the government implements comprehensive measures:

- On elevation of the society's spirituality and cultivation of respect to national traditions and customs;
- On explanation of true spiritual values leading to humanity, affirming honesty and justice;

- On cultivation of patriotism and love of home country;
- Development of principles of a secular state.

The September 24, 2013 Decree of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan approved “The 2013-2017 State Program on Counteraction against Religious Extremism and Terrorism in the Republic of Kazakhstan”.

This program’s goal is to ensure security of a person, society and nation by prevention of incidents of religious extremism and averting the threats of terrorism.

As part of implementation of the State Program government agencies pay particular attention to educational and explanatory work, measures of prevention of religious extremism and terrorism through media, rehabilitation of individuals who fell victim to ideological influence of radical and destructive religious sects.

For the first time, the program specified preventive actions on development of people’s immunity against radical religious sects, keeping tolerance and inter-faith accord in the society.

In this light, particularly topical are the words of President Nazarbayev in his December 14, 2012 Address to the people of Kazakhstan “Strategy “Kazakhstan 2050 –New Political Course of the Established State”：“The state should not interfere in internal affairs of religious communities. We have to follow inviolately the principle of freedom of conscience, traditions of general and religious tolerance”.

In general, it should be noted that at this stage, terrorism does not have boundaries. Citizens of many countries in the world are involved into terrorist activity; a lot of people suffer from its consequences.

Accordingly, there is a current real need in establishment of international interaction and cooperation in the area of combating terrorism, particularly in the Internet. In this regard, it is important that agreements be reached at the international level to provide for:

- Creation of a single list of extremist websites subject to banning in the space of all countries participating in the agreement;
- Determine the procedure for adding Internet resources into that list as well as the mechanism for shutting the access to them.

It is important to resolve the issue of uniform interpretation of terrorism and extremism at the international level because vagueness and multiplicity of definitions hinder the world community from development of a single approach to the most dangerous phenomenon of today – terrorism.

4. THE SITUATION WITH RESPECT TO RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN SOCIETY

With democratization of society, the role of public opinion grows significantly. Consideration of public opinion is an important component in making decisions in the area of religious relations. The country has recently carried out dozens of sociological surveys to study public opinion regarding issues of religious area. They were done by government-run and non-governmental organizations well-known in sociological circles.

According to results of the 2011-2013 sociological opinion polls we can state that a positive perception of the country’s current religious situation persistently dominated among population. In the average, about 90% of respondents described it as favorable or rather favorable. The share of

respondents with negative assessment of situation varied within 10%. Not more than 4% of respondents found it difficult to assess the situation.

Domination of the positive perception of the religious situation should be seen as a result of internal political stability in the country and avoidance of concrete incidents of extremism and terrorism in 2013.

Probability of conflicts in religious relations in the country is still very low. The religious situation and inter-faith relations do not evoke fears among common citizens. According to a recent survey the absolute majority of the country's population (92%) do not encounter incidents of inter-faith conflicts in every-day life.

In general, a firm opinion about safeness and low probability of conflicts in religious situation has established in Kazakhstani society. In the eyes of the majority of the country's citizens, at this stage, there are no evident disagreements between different religious groups. It is confirmed by the everyday practice and general situation in the country over several recent years.

Religious tolerance is an inalienable feature of Kazakhstani society. According to data obtained from surveys, the absolute majority of people do not consider religious affiliation to be a factor influencing the formation of their immediate social circle.

It is quite normal for Kazakhstanis to be neighbors, work, be friends, go to school with people who practice a different religion.

The attitude of Kazakhstanis to a certain faith is first of all determined by the extent of its popularity in the society. The higher the number of its followers, the higher its support in the society:

- A strongly pronounced positive attitude to the traditional Islam – 77 – 84% has shaped up in the society; it is quite reasonable, with the account of the number of its followers in Kazakhstani society;
- The society's attitude to the Orthodox Christianity, the second largest faith in Kazakhstan, can be described as positive-neutral. 43-55% of respondents gave it a positive assessment, 41-49% - neutral.
- Respondents showed neutral attitude to the majority of faiths included into the list: Judaism, Catholicism, Protestantism, and Buddhism;
- At this stage, negative perception only of non-traditional Islam (59-70%) prevails. The country's citizens display an unwelcoming attitude to its followers after the terrorist attacks which took place in the country with involvement of religious extremists.

The next important aspect of inter-faith relations is the nature of relationship between major religious groups: Muslims and Christians, representatives of traditional and non-traditional faiths, active believers and non-believers.

Relations between Muslims and Christians are characterized by the figures showing that the stable majority of respondents (67-71%) believe that there are no contradictions between those groups of population.

Regarding the status of inter-faith relations, a conclusion can be made that friendly and calm relationship has shaped between the major religious groups of people (traditional Islam and Orthodox Christianity). It exerts favorable impact on the religious situation in general. The fact that

these two confessional groups have lived together in the same territory for a long time, have similar cultural space, and a common historic past determine further stability of those relations. From the people's point of view, the only factor which can bring tension in inter-faith relations pertains to activities of religious sects non-traditional for Kazakhstan. People continue to show negative attitude towards them.

Kazakhstanis' religious tolerance is sufficiently high. A person's religious affiliation is not a factor for establishment of social barriers between members of the society. Representatives of various faiths interact peacefully in public and every-day life.

According to the results of sociological studies, the country's situation related to issues of observing the religious freedom principles has not changed for three years. According to public polls 79% of citizens show firm confidence that everyone in Kazakhstan can follow his faith; 16% of respondents are rather confident than not.

The country's population takes up positively the state policy pertaining to inter-faith relations as well as the policy pertaining to religion in general. Overall, 86% of citizens (the absolute majority) support actions of the government in this direction. 9% of respondents could not answer, and only 5% criticized the work of government organs in the area of inter-faith relations. Thereby, it confirms the fact that the state policy pertaining to religious relations rests on a wide social basis.

The next indicator according to which practically nobody in Kazakhstan has heard of any infringements on believers' rights seems interesting. According to results of public polls, only 5% of the country's population encountered such incidents.

5. RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND MEDIA

The topic of religious freedom and tolerance gets increasingly more coverage in media. It is determined by the growing interest of the society to religion.

Religious media owned by registered religious associations operate freely in Kazakhstan.

In recent years, activities of religious associations were characterized by noticeably growing volumes of printed matter on religious topics: periodicals are printed (magazines, newspapers), as well as brochures and booklets.

Practically all faiths were involved in stepping up the printed propaganda. If in the past, the faiths and religious groups new to Kazakhstan engaged in campaigning and education through printed materials, now the traditional Islam and Orthodox Church build up the number and volumes of their periodicals.

At this stage, 47 registered media outlets (45 printed media outlets, 20 of which are Christian, 21 Islamic, 2 media outlets of Judaism, and 2 Catholic) and 2 TV channels: 1 local and 1 foreign – operate in Kazakhstan. The following large religious media outlets can be highlighted:

- Islam and Civilization; E-Islam Internet portal; Orthodoxy; Credo; Humanistic World; The Light of Orthodoxy in Kazakhstan; Herald, Sholom, and others.

In recent times, religious associations pay significant attention to development of Internet resources which is instrumental in reaching out to big audience, passing the first-hand information. For example, activities of the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of Kazakhstan, of Kazakhstan's Orthodox Church, Roman Catholic Church, and Kazakhstan's Jewish community are noticeable.

Those media pay significant attention to:

- Religious ceremonies and their specific features;
- Religious upbringing;
- Spiritual conceptualization of sacred scriptures such as the Quran, the Bible and others;
- Inter-faith dialogue and tolerance;
- Religious holidays.

Notably, mutual greeting on religious holidays is practiced systematically which indicates openness and a respectable attitude between Kazakhstan's traditional faiths.

Unlike religious media, secular media cover religious issues from the following angles:

- Religion in the context of global culture and civilization;
- Religion as the legacy and invaluable spiritual experience of many generations of people;
- Problems of inter-faith dialogue in the global scale;
- Specific and unique features of Kazakhstani experience in societal tolerance;
- Basic theological principles of religion in the context of promulgation of kindness, justice, respect to one another;
- The state religious policy;
- Opinions of representatives of clergy on developments in the society;
- Activity of destructive religious organizations;
- Coverage of problems of religious extremism and terrorism.

In 2013, the Agency for Religious Affairs along with the Congress of Religious Scholars devised and put into operation the informational and educational Internet portal "E-Islam". Its goal is to increase the population's religious literacy, explain issues of interaction of secular principles with religious norms, and to prevent religious extremism.

Pursuant to article 2 of the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan "On Media":

1. The freedom of speech, creative activities, expression of views and convictions in printed or other forms, receipt and dissemination of information by any ways which are not banned by law are guaranteed by the Constitution of the Republic of Kazakhstan. Censorship is prohibited.
2. Government organs, public organizations, government officials and media should provide opportunities for every citizen to familiarize with documents, decisions and information sources affecting his rights and interests.

For the purpose of implementation of these norms government organs carry out the following work with engagement of secular media:

- Render methodological assistance to media in improvement of their employees' professional competence, building up knowledge of the religious sphere;
- Engage the capacity of media to educational campaigns on issues of raising population's religious literacy, inter-faith dialogue and accord in the country;
- Improve and introduce new methods and forms of informing the population of threats of religious extremism and terrorism with the account of the requirements and standards of ethics of journalism.

CONCLUSION

The country's Constitution and laws guarantee the freedom of conscience and practice of religion. The Constitution bans any forms of discrimination based on religious, ethnic or other grounds. The country joined major international agreements and treaties in the human rights area including the fundamental UN pacts in that area.

The legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan pertaining to religion and religious freedom complies with the principal norms of the Universal Human Rights Declaration, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and recommendations of OSCE.

Contemporary Kazakhstan has a tradition of high religious and ethnic tolerance.

Followers of all faiths in Kazakhstan enjoy wide opportunities to satisfy their spiritual needs. The government creates equal and favorable conditions for religions to implement their functions. A wide range of religious associations is represented in the country: from traditional religious teachings (Islam and Christianity) to new religious movements not seen in Kazakhstan in the past.

Though the majority of Kazakhstan's population consider themselves to be Muslims, it does not hinder fully-fledged functioning of other faiths. Its indication is the multiple growth of the number of non-Muslim religious associations. During the years of Kazakhstan's independence, the number of Orthodox, Catholic and Protestant communities increased several times.

The processes of religious revival are a result of the policy aimed at ensuring the religious freedom, spiritual progress, maintenance and consolidation of peace and inter-faith accord in the country.

A principal direction of the state policy is support of inter-faith dialogue. At the initiative of the President Nazarbayev such a unique institution of inter-ethnic and inter-faith dialogue as the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan was set up.

A remarkable example of non-existence of discriminatory approaches to believers and existence of inter-faith accord in Kazakhstan were the four Congresses of World and Traditional Religions held in Astana at the initiative and support of the country's President. Religious leaders and believers from numerous countries of the world participated in their work.

Kazakhstan's experience in setting up a dialogue between various religions and religious practices in Kazakhstan won recognition and support in the world.

Its indication is Kazakhstan's Chairmanship in OSCE in 2010 and in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation in 2011.

In their cooperation with believers, religious associations and groups, Kazakhstan's government organs are guided first and foremost by the principles of equality and the rule of law, observing and ensuring the believers' rights irrespective of their religious affiliation which rules out discrimination on religious basis.

The Agency for Religious Affairs regulates relations between the government, religious associations and individual citizens without interference in internal essential issues of faith. A dialogue and open cooperation are the major principles of the Agency's activity and interaction with representatives of religions and other civil society institutions.

All problems which emerge in operation of registered associations are resolved on the basis of a mutually acceptable consensus. For this purpose, the Agency arranges and holds meetings with representatives of all religious groups operating in Kazakhstan.

An important component of ensuring that the government takes opinions of religious organizations into account is the operation of the Council for Relations with Religious Associations under the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The Council performs consultative and advisory functions, and works out relevant recommendations on problems in religious sphere at the national level.

Provincial governors' and city mayors' offices, and district governments also have regional Councils for relations with religious associations which address issues pertaining to religious area at the local level. Members of those Councils are representatives of religious associations, non-governmental organizations, religious scholars and government organs.

Such councils as sites for discussion provide wide opportunities for engagement of religious associations and civil society in addressing the issues pertaining to religious rights and citizens' freedoms.

In general, we should note that at this stage, Kazakhstan has created a unique model of relationship between the state and religions based on non-interference into religious associations' internal affairs, respectful attitude to religious convictions and equality of representatives of all faiths before the law.

According to the 2013 final data of sociological surveys, at this stage, the total of 89% of the country's citizens support the state policy in the area of religion. It is a significantly higher indicator compared to previous periods. In this regard, with the account of public support to government initiatives in this area, the state policy in the sphere of religion can well be called successful.

The pattern and model of Kazakhstani people's inter-faith accord became an example to be followed by many other countries, a subject matter for experts, scholars and politicians of world scale to study.

Further measures for improvement of legislation pertaining to religious activity will target consistent in support of the implementation of citizens' religious freedom and establishment of a democratic legal field for operation of religious associations. It will let religious associations satisfy religious needs as well as engage in socially useful community activity, cooperate with the government in resolution of social and other problems which the society faces. In this regard, legislation of the Republic of Kazakhstan will develop in line with international legal acts, principles and norms of the international law.

The government and its organs will continue to facilitate involvement of representatives of the biggest possible number of religious associations in arrangement of national and local public, cultural events, in discussion of regulatory acts pertaining to issues of religion.

In order to keep social stability in the society it is planned to further develop the inter-faith dialogue, create a climate of mutual understanding and tolerance among representatives of various religions. For this purpose, the government will further support arrangement of round-tables, workshops, conferences on issues of inter-faith accord and religious tolerance as well as the provision of the freedom of religion and religious practice.