

RELIGION

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General information about religion in Azerbaijan

The religions of Azerbaijan comprise different religious trends spread among the people and ethnic groups residing in the country. There are several confessions in Azerbaijan.

Approximately 95% of the population of Azerbaijan is Muslim. The rest of the population adheres to other faiths or are non-religious, although they are not officially represented. Among the Muslim majority, religious observance varies and Muslim identity tends to be based more on culture and ethnicity rather than religion. The Muslim population is approximately 85% Shi'a and 15% Sunni; differences traditionally have not been defined sharply. Other traditional religions or beliefs that are followed by many in the country are the orthodox Sunni Islam, the Russian Orthodox Church, and various Christian sects. Traditionally villages around Baku and Lenkoran region are considered stronghold of Shi'ism. In some northern regions, populated by Sunni people.

Azerbaijan is a secular country, in article 48 of its Constitution ensures the liberty of worship to everyone. Everyone has a right to choose any faith, to adopt any religion or to not practice any religion, to express one's view on the religion and to spread it. According to paragraphs 1-3 of Article 18 of the Constitution the religion acts separately from the government, each religion is equal before the law and the propaganda of religions, abating human personality and contradicting to the principles of humanism is prohibited. At the same time the state system of education is also secular.

The law of the Republic of Azerbaijan (1992) "On freedom of faith" ensures the right of any human being to determine and express his view on religion and to execute this right.

History of religions

The peculiarities of the historical development of Azerbaijan, its geographical position and the national composition of the population created favorable conditions for the spread of different religions in the country. Such religions as heathenism, Zoroastrism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam and others managed to spread over the country in different periods, interacted with one another and established the specific religious life in the country.

Islam



Islam, which emerged in the Arabian Peninsula in the early 7th century soon managed to cover the biggest part of the world. The early representatives of this religion converted Azeri population to Islam with in the 18th year of Muslim era (639). Marzban of Azerbaijan Isfandiyar bin Farrukhzad was defeated by Arabs and concluded the contract in the same year. Arabs occupied Ardebil, Tebriz, Nakhichevan, Beylagan, Barda, Shirvan, Mugan and Arran thus reaching Derbend across the Caspian seashore. The fortifiers of the town resisted Arabs, which attached the city the name "Bab al-Abvab". Historian Belaruzi reported that the majority of the Azerbaijan's population accepted Islam in period of ruling of khalif Ali bin Abu Talyb (656-661). This process lasted a bit longer on the North. Arabs imposed taxes on the population of the occupied lands, continued invasions after striking the peaceful agreement and later returned. They resumed invasions as the local population refused paying taxes.

Some regions have been converted into Islam peacefully while others have been made accept the religion forcefully. The idolaters were suggested to accept Islam, those who did, had to pay zekat and kharadj and did not take part in battles together with Muslims; those participating were granted some of captured materials; while those not accepting the religion had to pay djizya and

were under the protection of Muslims; and those refusing to accept the religion or pay *djizya* had to fight against Muslims. Only Muslims inhabited borderline settlements-*ribads*. Muslims were moved to these regions from different provinces of the Caliphate to consolidate these regions while those who had not accepted Islam was driven to remote places called *rebed*.

Peace agreements struck by such Arabian commanders as Huzeyfe bin al-Yeman, Utbe bin Ferged, Velid bin Ugbe, Selman bin ar-Rabia al-Bahili, Bukeyr bin Abdullah, Surage bin Emr, Mesleme stipulated for inviolability of the life, property and religion of the population.

The form of converting Azerbaijan into Islam is difficult to speak on, as this matter has not yet been studied properly. However, it is possible to single out some of the stages of this process.

The first stage which lasted from the mid 7th century till the early 8th century was the period of progress of Islam. This stage ends with the overthrow of Albania and the loss of independence by Albanian church in 705. According to academician, Z.Bunyadov Islam dominated Azerbaijan at the end of this stage and state officials accepted this religion unconditionally to preserve their privileges. The new religion spread among merchants and artisans as Arabs granted privileges to this strata. Mosques were not built at that time and ancient temples and churches, which became useless because of the spread of Islam the predominance of tribal consciousness over religious consciousness was preserved.

The second stage covers the period from the 8th century to the reign of Buveyhiles in West Iran and Iraq. The Independent states of Shirvanshah Mazyadis and Sadjis were established in Azerbaijan. Idolatry and Zoroastrism lost their actuality, Judaism managed to survive, the independence of Albania was restored, yet due to its weak influence the praying ceremonies were held in Armenian language and their followers were armenified. The consciousness of belonging to Islam strengthened



at that period yet the ideas connected with the ethnic roots had not yet been completely lost. This could be observed in the shuubism movement, which was launched within the first years of the ruling of Abbasies. Babek's (816-838) rebellion is the brightest example of that process. The

theosophy of Islam developed in the borderline regions. Radical Shiism intensified in the mountain regions.

The third stage embraces the period of the Buveyhivs' ruling (935-1055). Neutral Shiism was formed in Azerbaijan and reached Derbend at that time. Shiism and Sunnis were the principle religious trends. Sufism was also quite widely spread among certain groups of people. One of the most beautiful monuments of Sufism was the cloister for dervishes on the Pirsaat river of Shirvan.

The fourth stage coincides with the times of Seldjugs (the mid 11th-mid 13th centuries). Sunnis strengthened while the position of Shiism weakened. Shafiism became the leading trend at that time and the sects of Sufism were widely spread. The Atabeys and Shirvanshahs managed to protect Islam from the pressure of Christianity.

The fifth stage covers the period of Mongolian invasions (the mid 13th-mid 15th century) Sufism was widely spread at that time and hurufism strengthened its position. Fazlullah Naimi (died in 1394) founded it. Abulhasan Aliyyul and poet Nasimi (died in 1417) were the most influential representatives of this trend. The second old man of the secret sect of Sufism Seyyid



Yahya Shirvani Bakuvi KHelveti (died in 1464) was famous at that time. One of the borther of Aggoyunlu ruler Uzun Gasan was the follower of the sheikh of the sect Dede Omar Rovsheni (died in 1487). Ibrahim bin Mohamed Gulsheni (died in 1534) founded the trend of Gulshaniyye as one the branches of the said sect in the second half of the 15th century. Later a number of trends in Sufism as negshbendiyye spread to Azerbaijan and the North

Caucasus through Azerbaijan.

The sixth stage is connected with the ruling of Sefevis (1501-1786) and Osmanlys since the 16th century (1281-1924). Sefevis propagandized Shiism and put on turbans with twelve red strips in the glorification of the 12 imams of Shiism. Therefore, they were called Gyzylbashes. Osmanlys, which defeated Sefevis in the battle at Chaldyran, spread Sunnis in Azerbaijan.

The period of Azerbaijan's annexation to the Russian Empire can also be regarded as a new stage in the religious life of the country. This period is notable for the attempts of the government to

subdue Muslim priests through the policy of establishing the religious structure of Islam similar to that of the Christian church. The letter that was sent to the Senate by the Russian Tsar on November 29, 1832 proposed to work out the statute on the department for work with Transcaucasia Muslims. However, none of the prepared drafts was approved. The official of the Minister of Foreign Affairs M.Khanykov by the instruction of knyaz Vorontsov worked out the draft statute on formation of Mohamed's clergymen in 1849. Though the draft was fully approved, it was not implemented due to the commencement of the Crimea war. A new commission was established to continue this work in 1864 and local representatives of Shiism and Sunnis were involved into it. Prepared regulations controlled the positions of Muslim clergymen, rights and privileges and relations with the secular government. Only Sheyhulislam and Mufti got wage from the government until 1867 while other Muslim clergymen started to get it beginning from this year. The Tsar of Russia ratified the regulation on the department for Islamic Sunnite and Shiite clergymen of Transcaucasia, introduced by the State council on April 5, 1872.

The department was mainly based on the structure of the Orthodox Church. Two Muslim administrative bodies-the Sunnite Religious department leaded by the Mufti and the Shiite Religious Department chaired by Sheyhulislam-were set up in the Caucasus. Each of these two departments locating in Tiflis was composed of the chair, three members of presidium, and two assistants along with the secretary, dragoman, clerk and registrar. Both two departments included four Assemblies in Tbilisi, Yerevan, Yelizavetpol (Ganja) and Baku provinces. The Sunni department included 16 confessors and Shiite-20 of them. The departments acted under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and reported directly to the governor. The local government bodies controlled provincial clergymen.

The religious affairs of the Caucasus Muslims had been regulated by these two departments until the establishment of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan (1918-1920). Sheyhulislam Mohamed Pishnamazzade sent into resignation on December 11, 1918. Akhund Agha Alizade was appointed Sheyhulislam by the decree of Musa Rafibeyov, the Minister of Social Insurance and Religious Conviction of the Democratic Republic of Azerbaijan. This period was notable for strengthening of tendencies, which aimed at rationing, and modernizing of Islam.

Following the establishment of the Soviet government in Azerbaijan in 1920 the Ministry of Religious Conviction and Sheyhulislamism were dismissed on May 15, Muslim clergymen were

persecuted, most of the Mosques were closed down. The creation of Religious structure of Transcaucasia Muslims was considered advisable for the use of religion in struggle against German fascism in 1943.

The first session of the Transcaucasia Muslims was held in Baku on May 25-28 and the Religious Department for Transcaucasia Muslims was established in this city. Akhund Agha Alizade was appointed Sheyhulislam. He is the first elected Sheyhulislam as the government appointed those preceding him. Moreover, the dualism was abolished in the religious organizations of the Caucasus Muslims in 1944. The Religious Department of Transcaucasia Muslims became a common center that was controlled by Sheykhulislam, Mifli was considered the first deputy chair of the Department and regulated the problems of Sunnites.

This department acts as the Caucasus Muslims Department and is the center of all other religious communities of Islam

Heathenism

The heathenism established on the basis of primitive religions as a totality of all polytheistic beliefs. The heathenism beliefs of the population of Azerbaijan date back to antiquity and cover different national faiths beginning from animism, fetishism, religion of totem, shamanism up to beliefs in the single God. Philological and ethnographic researches make it possible to create the picture of Heathenism on the territory of the country. Archeological digs discovered big stone idols in Khynysly, Daghkolany, Shyraghly, anthropomorphic statues in Ismayilly, clayey monuments in Mingechevir. One can come across the patterns of beliefs in God in the epos of Dede-Gorgut.



The ceremonies connected with Heathenism were mostly presented in the form of synthesis that is the beliefs did not differ much, influenced one another and participated conjointly in the formation of the system of moral values of local population, through supplementing each other. The worshipping of dead ancestors, rocks and trees (maple, oak, etc), natural phenomenon and celestial bodies were strong in ancient Azerbaijan. Strabon reported on Albanian's worshipping of the Sun, the Moon, and the Sky. The oak tree best known as Tanry khan (the ruling God) was worshipped and sacrificed horses. Movses Kalankatvasi

reports that Albanian rulers called for struggle against heathenism for spreading Christianity and cut away the trees, which served as idols.

Like other eastern countries the beliefs in the constituency of the Universe of four main elements- ground, air, water and fire were widely spread among ancient Azerbaijanis. Fire-worship was also established on the basis of such beliefs. Fire was thought holy and worshipped by most people residing in Azerbaijan. People believed in the ability of fire to destroy meanness and lowness and to purify people. The fire ceremonies that survived up to present along with the holiday of Novruz show the strength of traditions of fire-worship in Azerbaijan.

A temple of fire is the praying house of fire-worship. The temples of fire-worshippers existed in the religious centers of Atropatena-Gazaka, Baku, Shemakha and Lenkoran. A temple of fire locating in Surakhany was erected in the 18th century for fire-worshippers coming from India.

Though persecuted by Christianity, the fire-worship of the Caucasus Albania managed to survive. With the appearance of Islam in Azerbaijan the fire-worship gradually lost its importance and sank into oblivion.

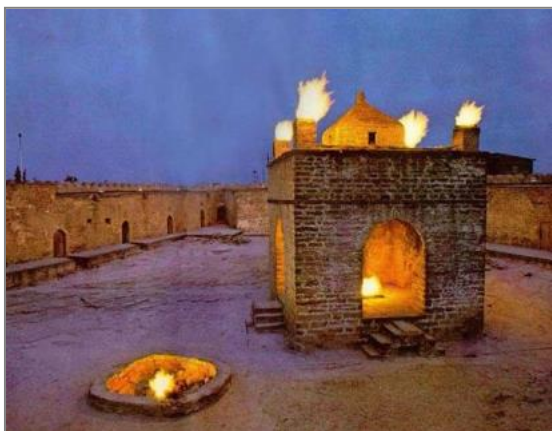
Zoroastrism

Though based on the fire-worship, Zoroastrism emerged as an independent religion. M. Bors pointed out that Zoroastrism had been the most ancient among the prophetic religions. The Holy book of this religion Qatas that was part of Avesta was sent down to Zoroaster, religious teacher and prophet (6th century B.C.). According to some sources, Zoroaster's father came from Azerbaijan. According to Zoroastrism, the world lays on two components-the Good and the Evil, which lead constant struggle with one another. The world of the Light, Goodness and Justice is embodied in Hormuzd (Ahura-Mazda), the world of the Darkness, the Evil and Tyranny in Ahriman (Ahura-Manyu).



The struggle will be finally won by the Good and the active followers of Ahura-Mazda in his struggle against the Evil and Tyranny will meet with the happiness of eternity. The ideas of the

happiness of eternity, sins and good deeds prove the maturity of Zoroastrism. Zoroaster urged people to be more just and purer and to struggle against any meanness.



Fire occupied the important place in the Zoroastrian beliefs therefore Zoroastrians were often considered fire-worshippers. Zoroastrians thought corpses nasty and therefore did not bury them into the ground but kept them in special places in the mountains for birds and worms to eat. Only after that, they gathered the purified bones and buried them.

The Zoroastrian beliefs acquired the form of dogma in the 3rd century B. C. Zoroastrism spread on the territory of Azerbaijan until Derbend due to the military and political progress of Sasanies. Iranian Zoroastrians were moved to the country for spreading the new religion. At the same time Zoroastrism adopted local features in Azerbaijan. The Caucasus Albanians buried jewelries and kitchen utensils together with their dead owners. It is also known that after the purification of the bones of dead people, they were placed in a big pot-like coffin and thus buried. The dead people were also buried in the ground, pottery coffins, underground tombs, hollow graves.



Constant wars between Sasanis and Byzantines for expanding their areas of influence in Azerbaijan resulted in strengthening of either Christianity or Zoroastrism. In such conditions Islam found way to the most intensive and peaceful spreading in the country.

Since the Middle Ages Zoroastrism could not react to the cultural and political requirements of the time thus losing its actuality.

Christianity

Christianity is represented by Orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism as well as a number of sectarian communities in Azerbaijan.

Orthodoxy is currently represented in Azerbaijan by the Russian and Georgian Orthodox churches. The Russian Orthodox Churches are grouped in the Eparchy of Baku and the Caspian region.



Azerbaijan also has eleven Molokan communities related to the old rituals of orthodoxy. These communities do not have any church; their dogmas are fixed in a special book of rituals. They oppose the church hierarchy which has a special power.

Christianity influenced Azerbaijan by means of the Caucasus Albania in the first years of the new era in times of Christ's apostils. The inflow of Jews to the Caucasus intensified after the overthrow of Jerusalem. The new comers told about the wonders that had been demonstrated by Jesus. The first Christian communities established under the influence of such propaganda. The first stage of spreading of Christianity was called the *period of apostils* in connection with apostils Varfolomei and Faddey. One of the progenies of apostil Faddey started to spread the new religion by the benediction of the first patriarch of Jerusalem Yegub reached the land of Agvan and erected a church in Kish village. Later Yelisey moved to Chola (Derbend) and passing the river Samur continued to propagandize the religion and was killed by one of idolaters of Helmes village and thrown to a hole. Later Yelisey's corpse was lifted from the hole by the instruction of Albanian melik Vachagan and buried in Khug village, and a small temple was erected over the hole.

When Roman emperor Constantine lifted veto from practice of Christianity in 313, Albanian ruler Urnayr declared Christianity the state religion. A new stage in the spread of Christianity called the *period of pro-Greek* emerged in Azerbaijan since that time. Academician Ziya Bunyadov points out that Urnayr, Vache the second and Vachagan the third fought for spreading Christianity in the country. The priesthood and church hierarchy formed in the 3rd-4th centuries. Feudal lords allotted special area for churches on their lands by the instruction of the Catholicicon. Churches were built in the region and religious books were translated from Syrian, Arami and Greek language to Albanian. The book "In Albanian script and Albanian language is considered the most ancient public reader of the world Christianity.

At a session in Khalkidon church in 451 Albania preferred monophysitism and the fight between monophysites and polyphysites strengthened in the country in the 5-6th centuries. Albanian church accepted diophysitism in the late 6th-early 7th century.

The residence of Albanian Catholicos located in the Gochay city and it moved to Barda in 552. After the overthrow of Albanian meliks the role of Christianity weakened in the country the prayers were conducted in Armenian language in the churches, Albanian language was oppressed and led out.

Albanian church restored its status of the autocephaly church during the formation of independent states on the territory of Azerbaijan in 8th-9th centuries. Eastern Christianity managed to retain its influence on the region in 10th-11th centuries. This state lasted until 18th century. Albanian church was abolished by instruction of Synod in 1836 and the whole



property of the church was delivered to the Armenian church of Echmiadzin. The Albanian church was once more restored in the 1980-1990s. The government in 2003 registered the Albanian-Udi Christian community, following the restoration of the Kish church in Sheki. The church of Nich village is currently being restored in Gabala district.

Christianity was represented by orthodoxy, Catholicism and Protestantism and by a number of sectarian communities in Azerbaijan. Five Armenian-Gregorian communities have been registered in the country.

Orthodoxy was imported to Azerbaijan in frames of the policy of resettlement led by the Russian tsarist regime in early 19th century. The first orthodox church of Baku started operating in 1815.

Sectarian Christians were driven to the Caucasus to avoid the hard consequences of separations occurring in the Russian Orthodox Church. The first Russian migrants set up Alty-Aghadj village in Shamakhy in 1834, Vel village in Lenkoran in 1838, Borisi-Russian village of Yelizavetpol in 1842 and Slavyanka village in 1844. Baku province accounted for 21 sectarian villages with the population of 13 thousand people in 1868.

Catholicism. Russian Army created the Roman Catholic Parish in Baku due to the resettlement of military Catholics to the Caucasus in the 1850s. The parish was under the military Roman-Catholic parish of Tetri-Skaroda (Georgia). The Baku parish became independent in 1882. The church in glorification of the Immaculate Conception of Saint Maria was erected in 1895; the church of the Holy Cross was constructed in the Baku cemetery in 1903. The new church of the Immaculate Conception of Saint Maria, which is considered the most beautiful architectural monuments of Baku, was built in a gothic style in 1909-1912. The Roman-Catholic community was restored in Baku in 1999. The community established its temple in 2001. A piece of land has already been allotted for the construction of Roman-Catholic church in Baku. Former Roman Pope John Paul the second paid an official visit to Baku on May 22-23 of 2002.

Baptism. The followers of the Lutheran church arrived in Baku along with German industrialists taking part in the development of oil fields in the second half of the 19th century. The visit was mainly caused by political and religious unrest that took place in Germany in early 19th century. At that time people rumored that the West is nearing the Apocalypse only the East may save everyone. The population and especially the sectarians tried to run away from the questions about the Apocalypse to Russia and the Caucasus. Two hundred nine German families resided in Azerbaijan early 1819. The Lutheran community was established in Baku in 1870. The community members constructed their temple-circa (currently the hall of Organ and Camera Music) in Baku in 1899. The circa had been built even earlier in Yelendorf (present-day Khanlar). The priests of Lutheran church along with representatives of other religious communities were sent into exile and executed by shooting in 1937. The Lutheran community resumed its activity in Baku in 1944.

Judaism

Historically Judaism has been represented by the mountain Jews. Movses Kalankatvasi refers the arrival of mountain Jews in the Caucasus to the 1st century B.C, while researchers have different view upon this issue.

According to one source, mountain Jews which are the most ancient Jewish communities generate from the people of Israel, driven away from Palestine by the shahs of Assyria and Babylon and settled in Midia. Their ancestors were the first to establish Judaism, resided apart from

Palestine, and did not participate in the persecutions of Jesus Christ in the beginning of their formation as a single community. In Media, they formed mixed communities with tats. Thus, mountain Jews spoke the language of tats, which are the dialect comprising Persian arami and Hewish words.

Other researched consider that mountain Jews were moved to the East Caucasus by Sasani ruler Khosrov Anushirevan the first (531-574). The ruler-built towers in the Caucasus and settled Persians and Jews, removed from Mesopotamia to these cities. The tat language spoken by mountain Jews also survived since that period.



At least it is known that mountain Jews came to Azerbaijan fifteen centuries ago as a result of the policy of Sasanies, were settled in the borderline districts for ensuring the security of the country, and though being in close relations with local inhabitants they preserved their religion, traditions, life style and the way of thinking.

Tolerance in Azerbaijan

The late 20th century was marked with the collapse of socialism, alterations in the political



map of the world and appearance and deterioration of a number of problems related to different spheres of public life. Due to the lack of attention to moral and ethic values along with economic, ecological and demographic problems, the problems of morality even deteriorated. Besides the theory of the clash of civilizations based on religious differences emerged and found its supporters at that time. Some separatist groups

used religious dogmas for proving themselves right in their activity.

Under such conditions the establishment of a dialogue between nations and cultures was important for protection of various cultures of the humanity. The experience of countries and regions rich in the traditions of tolerance and patience could serve an example in this connection. The peaceful coexistence of a number of nations and religious confessions in Azerbaijan is a unique pattern of tolerance.

These traditions come from ancient times: the Jews running away from the Jewish kingdom, ruined as a result of occupation of Jerusalem by Babil ruler Novukhodonosur the Second (586 B.C.) found refuge on the territory of Azerbaijan. According to the historical data Babil captured nearly 40 thousand of prisoners.

The first followers of Christianity settled in Azerbaijan in the first century A.C. and laid a foundation of Albanian autocephaly church that later was set up there. The traditions of tolerance even strengthened with the spread of Islam on the territory of Azerbaijan. The Muslim tolerance bases on the suras and citations from the holy book Koran.



According to historians Muslims displayed tolerance and patience to Judaism, Christianity and Zoroastrian trend in 7th-8th century.

The common fate of numerous ethnic and religious groups residing on the territory of Azerbaijan played a great role in the establishment of strong contacts between them. Peoples residing in Azerbaijan through the whole its history repeatedly fell under the dependence on other strong states and the established situation obliged them to get closer despite differences in views.

The collapse of the Soviet Union turned into a hard ordeal for traditions of religious tolerance in the region. As a result of this process the peoples of the former union republics gained liberty of faith along with independence. The Armenian occupation, causing death to thousands of innocent people and making millions of our compatriots flee their houses, threatened the tolerance peculiar of Azerbaijan. Though Azeri-Armenian conflict did not have a religious ground the religious leader of Armenia Vazgen the First was in fact one of the inciters of the separatist movement.

The irreconcilable Armenians tried to spread a myth in Russia and West that Islam in Azerbaijan threatens the peace. From the other hand some forces tried to convert Muslim population of the republic into Christianity for spreading anti-war and even pro-Armenian tendencies. No doubt that such a movement did not serve the strengthening of a dialogue between religions. Yet these processes could not have a decisive negative impact on relations between religious confessions.

These relations improved after Heydar Aliyev had come to power. No doubt that clergyman also made a definite contribution to the preservation of traditions of tolerance. All religious confessions are equal before the law and have the same status in frames of the model of state-religion relations of present-day Azerbaijan. Along with ensuring the rights of Muslims constituting the majority of the country citizens, the government of Azerbaijan takes care of other religions spread in the country as well. Thus, the building of the head church Djen Mironosets, shutdown in 1920 was delivered to the Russian Orthodox Church in 1991. All-Russia and Moscow patriarch Alexei the second, staying on visit in Azerbaijan, declared this temple holy and attached the status of the cathedral church to it on May 27, 2001.

The opening ceremony was attended by former President Heydar Aliyev, members of the government, representatives of embassies and leaders of religious communities. It should be mentioned that Azeri businessman Aydyn Gurbanov, who practiced Islam and resided in Moscow, undertook the restoration of the Temple. The head cathedral church was soon restored through his

funds and was commissioned to the pious. Moreover, another orthodox temple-the head church of Saint Maria was restored in the capital city in 1999-2001.

The government also takes care of the catholic communities registered by the government as a result of the efforts of Polish priest Yerzhi Pilyus. The first meetings were held in the houses of the pious; a building was bought for the purpose in 2000 and turned to a small church. Two priests appointed by Vatican serve in the catholic community and the pious pray on Sundays and days of religious festivities. A catholic church, the project of which has been agreed upon with Vatican, is currently being constructed in the capital of Azerbaijan. It will resemble the former catholic church of Baku by its external design.

The cultural heritage of the country's Jewish community which has ancient traditions is also attached a great deal of attention by the government of Azerbaijan. It would be enough to mention that the department of Judaism has been established within the faculty of Oriental studies of the State University of Baku and the Institute of Ethnography of the National Academy of Sciences has started working out the book "The Jews in Azerbaijan" in cooperation with the Russian fund for development and protection of Jewish culture. Moreover, an international seminar devoted to the mountain Jews of the Caucasus was held in the National Academy of Sciences of Azerbaijan in 2001 and Semyon Ikhiilov, chair of the religious community of mountain Jews was conferred with the order of Fame late 2000.

The organization for relations between Azerbaijan and Israel and the society Sokhnut had been operating in the country since 1990. The interviews with famous representatives of Jewish



communities were issued in the newspapers of the country at Jewish holidays. The memory boards have been preserved on the houses, places of residence of such prominent Jewish people as Lev Landau, theorist physician and winner of the Nobel award, Solomon Qusman, the honored doctor of the Republic, Albert Aqarunov, war hero and other well-known persons in Baku.

Speaking about the care displayed for Jews in Azerbaijan particular attention should be paid to Krasnaya Sloboda district. The district is the only place of compact residing of the Jews in the

whole post-Soviet area (nearly 4 thousand people live there). Azerbaijan accounted for 11 synagogues in period preceding the establishment of the USSR. Only one of them operated in the Soviet times. Two more synagogues were restored by the government after 1996. The ceremony devoted to the restoration of the two-storied six-dome synagogue was held with participation of state officials and a number of foreign visitors in October of 2001.

Azerbaijan never admitted anti-Semitism. The former President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev told at the meeting with Jewish communities held November 15, 1998: "Such events are not registered in the Republic and we'll never permit them to be". The valuable experience of Azerbaijan in the sphere of interreligious dialogue and cooperation has been highly appreciated and is well-known to everyone in the world. The historical visit of the former head of the Roman Catholic church Johan Paul the Second may serve the brightest example of that (May 22-24, 2002). The pontific highly appreciated the traditional historical patience of Azerbaijan. Historically those Christians persecuted by the Roman government found refuge in our country.

The Patriarch of Rome Varfolomei the first paid an official visit to Azerbaijan on April 16-18 of 2003. The visit aimed to agree on a number of complicated problems exciting concern of people of different religions, to establish close relations and to advance the interreligious dialogue. The patriarch had visited three Muslim countries before arriving in Azerbaijan. He acknowledged that relations state-religion as well as the traditional and nontraditional religious confessions is exemplary. He said: "I'm satisfied with the level of tolerance in the country. Everyone in Azerbaijan can practice any religion he wants and in any way he wishes".



It should be mentioned that the national government constantly meets with the leaders of religious communities and displays interest in their problems and needs. President Ilham Aliyev always delivers congratulating speeches on the occasion of the major religious holidays of Christians and Jewish people. Thus, in his speech on occasion of Christmas holiday addressed to the orthodox community of Azerbaijan in January, 2004 the President noted that the historical tolerance and patience formed in Azerbaijan had turned to one of the properties typical of the Azeri society.

The document stated: "The holiday that embodies the victory of the Good over the Evil and concepts of freedom is celebrated every year by all Christians of the world. The orthodox community that resides in Azerbaijan for over 200 years and displays devotedness to their religious values conducts various ceremonies aiming to strengthen the sincerity and friendship between the people and undertakes different measures for worthy celebration of the holiday."

The constructive position of religious leaders also plays an important role in the formation of tolerance in Azerbaijan. Due to that the meeting of religious leaders of Russia and the Caucasus countries held in Moscow on November 26, 2003 is of great importance. The said historical event resulted in acceptance of a due document. The document stated that the national minorities must be integrated in all spheres of public life, their liberty of faith must be ensured and they must be created conditions for development of their cultures and language for restoration of mutual understanding between the peoples of the Caucasus.

The meeting of former Roman Pope Johan Paul the second with a presidium comprising



clergymen of our country was one of significant events in the development of interreligious dialogue. The presidium included Allahshukur Pashazade, chair of the Caucasus Muslims Department, the episcope of the Baku and Russian orthodox Alexander and Semyon Ikhiilov, chair of the religious community of mountain Jews. At the meeting held in Vatican November 18, 2004 the pontific highly appreciated the relations between

the religious confessions in Azerbaijan and expressed regret about the bloody conflicts in the Caucasus. "He announced: "No one has been permitted to use religions as a means for aggression, violence and murder and present as designed for the said purposes. On the contrary, the interreligious friendship and mutual respect constitute the real progress and peace.

The State Committee for the Workwith Religious Associations of Azerbaijan makes a great contribution to the protection and preservation of the traditions of tolerance. The said organization permanently conducts meetings and seminars with participation of religious leaders for establishment of closer relations and mutual understanding between them. Thus, the committee for

work with religious communities held a seminar covering the topic "Religious stability-the integral part of the common stability" on April 3, 2004. The seminar participants discussed the religious tolerance and the role of religious communities in the combat with terrorism and approved the participation of Azerbaijan in the international coalitions targeting the terrorism. At the same time it was noted that neither Islam nor any other religion can be regarded as terrorism.

The Committee for work with religious communities arranged subsequent seminars (ten) for the leaders of religious communities from September 8 till November 10 of 2004. The seminars mainly focused at the discussion of the relations between the state and religions and the strengthening of tolerance between various trends in religion. Thus, the first seminar was entitled "The state and religion: seek for the social peace and unity of thoughts". Professor Rauf Guseynov delivered a lecture on the history of Christianity in Azerbaijan on October 6, 2004. The last seminar was devoted to the topic "The way to religion and peace". Professor Rafiq Aliyev, chair of the state committee concluded the works carried out for the development of mutual understanding and unity of thoughts of different religions of the country and determined the trends in cooperation for the sake of the entire population.

NGOs and international organizations also contribute to the expansion of cooperation between representatives of different religious confessions. Thus a seminar on the role of Islam in formation of tolerance in the South Caucasus was held at the International Press Center on June 22, 2004. The seminar arranged by the Fund of Frederick Nauman (Germany) in cooperation with the independent consulting center "For the Civil Society" (Azerbaijan), the international center for Conflicts and Negotiations (Georgia) and The US Committee for Jews (USA) was attended by representatives of different religions, politicians, historians and experts from Azerbaijan, USA, Germany and Georgia.

The Ambassador of Germany Claus Grewlikh paid a particular attention to the unique model of the relations between the state and religion in Azerbaijan. Within the framework of this model the representatives of religious communities are not satisfied with neighborhood they even try to interact in their activities. "The interreligious tolerance and patience typical of Azerbaijan can serve a positive example for all European states. Now it's possible to export the model of relations between religions and the state in Azerbaijan. This is your wealth"-the ambassador said.

At the international symposium on the Islamic civilization in the Caucasus President Heydar Aliyev said: "There are a number of religions in the world and each of them occupy its own specific place. We Azerbaijanis being proud of our religion-Islam, have never displayed negative hostile attitude, towards other religions, never been at enmity and never obliged other nations to practice our religion.

On the whole, Islam is notable for tolerance to other religions and coexistence in conditions of mutual understanding with other religions. This process has been registered both in Azerbaijan and in the Caucasus. Christianity and Judaism existed and currently exist in Azerbaijan along with Islam. We consider people of any religion or nationality should respect other cultures, religions and moral values and be patient to unpleasant traditions of other religions.

Muslim holidays

Gurban Holiday

The religious holiday of making sacrifice – the Gurban Holiday is celebrated every year by all Muslim worlds. The religious rites of making sacrifice have existed long before Islam.

After the second year of Hijra when the prophet Mohammed has moved from Medina to Mecca, new patterns of making sacrifices in Islamic world have emerged and formed as extending assistance the poor and orphans, making good deeds to make desires come true. The religious ceremonial of making sacrifice takes its roots from the event that happened to Prophet Ibrahim. He dreamt that Allah orders him to sacrifice his son Ismail to test his belief in God. As a true follower, Ibrahim was ready to fulfill the Divine order as well as Ismail stood ready to be sacrificed. During Gurban holiday, every rich Moslem had to sacrifice an animal, share and distribute its meat to the poor and the orphans. The act of making sacrifice had to elevate anyone spiritually till the highest level of faith. The Koran says: “The Allah needs neither flesh, nor animal’s blood, but only your faith”.

The Gurban holiday is celebrated 2 days.

Note: A new rule has been enacted from 2006 which stipulates that if the holiday is coinciding with a day-off, the next following day is deemed as a day-off.

Ramadan Holiday

The holy month of Ramadan is defined as an important month for Moslems in second year of Hijra (year of 622). The month of Ramadan teaches everyone to love with all heart the deeds of Allah passing through testing of body and strengthening of moral spirit. Moslems are fasting during that month – the procedure is called orujlug.

The history of Orujlug dates back to the second year of Hijra when prophet Mohammed has determined the month of Ramadan for Moslems in the city of Medina. It is exactly during last 10 nights of the month of Ramadan Allah has gifted the Koran to Moslems. There is a saying that this handover is happened in the night from the 23rd to the 24th or in the night from the 26th to the 27th. This night is called “Laylat al-Qadr” - Night of Power and Might and described in the Koran

as follows: “We have indeed revealed strength, might in the Night of Power; The Night of Power is stronger than a thousand months; The Angels descended down on the Earth and are waiting for the Allah's order; Peace in this Night until the rising of the dawn” (97:1 - 5).

During Orujlug, it is not allowed to eat in daytime, smoke and fulfill marital obligations etc. Only children, pregnant women, anyone who is seriously ill, warriors and travelers are free from fasting. Orujlug comes with the rise of a new Moon and lasts 29 – 30 days. The Koran says: “Eat and drink till you can make a difference between dark and white threads, and then respect your oruj till dusk” (2:187).

Orujlug existed even before Islam. The Koran says the following about it: “As you are instructed to respect your oruj, the same instruction was also given to your predecessors.”

Orujlug finishes with the holiday called Eid ul-Fitr. During this day, all rich and known Moslems must help the poor Moslems. Starting from 1993, the Orujlug holiday is celebrated at State level.

Note: A new rule has been enacted from 2006 which stipulates that if the holiday is coinciding with a day-off, the next following day is deemed as a day-off

Muslim calendar

Muslims do not traditionally "celebrate" the beginning of a new year, but we do acknowledge the passing of time, and take time to reflect on our own mortality.

Muslims measure the passage of time using the Islamic (*Hijrah*) calendar. This calendar has twelve lunar months, the beginnings and endings of which are determined by the sighting of the crescent moon. Years are counted since the *Hijrah*, which is when the Prophet Muhammad migrated from Mecca to Madinah (approximately July 622 A.D.).

The Islamic calendar was first introduced by the close companion of the Prophet, 'Umar ibn Al-Khattab. During his leadership of the Muslim community, in approximately 638 A.D., he consulted with his advisors in order to come to a decision regarding the various dating systems used at that time. It was agreed that the most appropriate reference point for the Islamic calendar was the *Hijrah*, since it was an important turning point for the Muslim community. After the emigration to Madinah (formerly known as Yathrib), the Muslims were able to organize and establish the first real Muslim "community," with social, political, and economic independence. Life in Madinah allowed the Muslim community to mature and strengthen, and the people developed an entire society based on Islamic principles.

The Islamic calendar is the official calendar in many Muslim countries, especially Saudi Arabia. Other Muslim countries use the Gregorian calendar for civil purposes and only turn to the Islamic calendar for religious purposes. The Islamic year has twelve months that are based on a lunar cycle. Allah says in the Qur'an:

"The number of months in the sight of Allah is twelve (in a year) - so ordained by Him the day He created the heavens and the earth...." (9:36).

"It is He Who made the sun to be a shining glory, and the moon to be a light of beauty, and measured out stages for it, that you might know the number of years and the count of time. Allah did not create this except in truth and righteousness. And He explains His signs in detail, for those who understand" (10:5).

And in his final sermon before his death, the Prophet Muhammad said, among other things, *"With Allah the months are twelve; four of them are holy; three of these are successive and one occurs singly between the months of Jumaada and Sha'ban."*

Islamic months begin at sunset of the first day, the day when the lunar crescent is visually sighted. The lunar year is approximately 354 days long, so the months rotate backward through the seasons and are not fixed to the Gregorian calendar. The months of the Islamic year are:

1. *Muharram* ("Forbidden" - it is one of the four months during which it is forbidden to wage war or fight)
2. *Safar* ("Empty" or "Yellow")
3. *Rabia Awal* ("First spring")
4. *Rabia Thani* ("Second spring")
5. *Jumaada Awal* ("First freeze")
6. *Jumaada Thani* ("Second freeze")
7. *Rajab* ("To respect" - this is another holy month when fighting is prohibited)
8. *Sha'ban* ("To spread and distribute")
9. *Ramadan* ("Parched thirst" - this is the month of daytime fasting)
10. *Shawwal* ("To be light and vigorous")
11. *Dhul-Qi'dah* ("The month of rest" - another month when no warfare or fighting is allowed)
12. *Dhul-Hijjah* ("The month of Hajj" - this is the month of the annual pilgrimage to Mecca, again when no warfare or fighting is allowed)

**Extract from the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan
(November 12, 1995)**

Article 18. Religion and state

I. Religion in the Azerbaijan Republic is separated from state. All religions are equal before the law.

II. Spreading and propaganda of religions humiliating people' dignity and contradicting the principles of humanism are prohibited.

III. State educational system is secular.

Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan "On Freedom of Religious Belief"

Chapter I General Provisions

Article 1. Freedom of Religious Belief

Everyone shall determine his/her attitude to religion independently and shall have the right to confess any religion individually or together with others, and express or spread his/her belief dealing with his/her attitude to religion.

It is not allowed to prevent anyone from determining his/her attitude to religion, in confessing religion, taking part in liturgies, making religious rites and rituals and studying religion.

It is prohibited to propagandize religions with the appliance of religious violence or sowing discord among the people with the aim of changing their religious way of life or forcing to confessing religion.

Freedom of religion can be restrained only for the reasons of state and public security and in the event of the necessity to protect rights and freedoms, in accordance with the Azerbaijan Republic's international commitments.

Foreigners and persons without citizenship shall be prohibited to conduct religious propaganda.

Parents or persons replacing them have the right to bring up their children in accordance with their own religious beliefs and religious beliefs upon mutual consent.

Article 2. Legislation on Religious Freedom

The legislation of religious liberty consists of this Law, which provides the main guarantee for religious liberty and the activity of religious associations in accordance with Constitution of the Azerbaijan Republic, and other relevant legislative documents of the Azerbaijan Republic.

Article 3. Objective of the Law on Religious Freedom

The Law shall:

- guarantee the right of everyone in the Azerbaijan Republic to determine and express his/her attitude to religion and to realize this right; ensure social justice, equality of rights, protection of rights and legal interests of citizens regardless of their attitude to religion, in accordance with the legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic and international-legal norms accepted by the Azerbaijan Republic;

- determine state obligations in regard to religious associations;
- determine duties of religious associations to the state and to society;
- promotes to establishing a situation favourable for displaying national morality and humanism regardless of world outlook and religious convictions of people, well-being and collaboration of citizens;
- regulates relations connected with the activities of religious associations

Article 4. Legal Equality of Citizens Irrespective of their Religious Beliefs

Citizens of the Azerbaijan Republic have equal legal rights in all spheres of political, economic, public and cultural life regardless of their attitude to religion. Indication of citizens' attitude to religion in official documents shall be allowed upon his/her wish only.

No one shall have the right to refuse or decline to fulfill obligations determined by the law for his/her religious beliefs.

Changing performing one duty by another for religious motives is permitted only in cases stipulated by the legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic.

Article 5. State and Religious Associations

In the Azerbaijan Republic, religion and religious associations shall be separated from the state.

The state shall not instruct religious associations to fulfill any state's affair and doesn't interfere with their activities.

All religions and religious associations shall be equal in relation to the law. Establishing any superiority or limitations for one religion in comparison to another shall not be allowed.

Religious associations shall have the right to take part in public life and, along with public associations, use mass media.

Religious associations shall not partake in the activity of political parties and help them financially.

In case of being appointed to work for a state agency or transfer to a state post, the activity of a cult servant, as a spiritual person, shall be suspended for a relevant term.

Religious associations perform the existing laws of the Azerbaijan Republic and bear responsibility to them.

Article 6. Relations Between Religion and Schools

In the Azerbaijan Republic, the system of state education is separated from religion.

Theological, religious and religious-philosophical subjects, as well as acquaintance with the bases of sacred-cult books may be included into educational programs of state educational associations.

Citizens have the right to study theology and receive religious education in any language, individually or together with others.

In accordance with their relevant charters (provisions), religious associations have the right to create, for the purpose of religious enlightening of children and adults, educational associations and groups, and also teach them in other forms and use them-owned properties for this purpose.

Chapter II Religious Associations in the Azerbaijan Republic

Article 7. Religious Associations

Religious communes, departments and the center, cloisters, spiritual educational institutions and their associations shall be religious associations. Religious associations are represented by their center (departments).

Religious associations shall be voluntary organizations of age citizens created for the purpose of joint realization of the right to freedom of religion, as well as for spreading religious beliefs and cults.

Religious associations shall act in accordance with this Law and their approved charters (provisions).

Article 8. Religious Community

Religious commune is a local religious association of religious persons, who have united voluntarily for the purpose of conducting joint liturgies and satisfying other religious needs.

In the Azerbaijan Republic, Islamic religious communities are subordinated by the Caucasian Muslims Board, in terms of organizational matters, whereas non-Islamic religious associations have the right to be subordinated and to change their respective subordination to religious centers (organizations) operational in the Azerbaijan Republic and outside it.

Article 9. Religious Center and Departments

In the Azerbaijan Republic, Islamic religious communes are united in their historical center - the Caucasian Muslims Board.

Non-Islamic religious communes, which leading centers are situated outside the Azerbaijan Republic, can follow, in carrying out activities, charters of their respective centers in cases, which don't contradict the legislation of the Azerbaijan Republic.

Not determined by legislation relationship between Government and religious center and administration, including those ones situated outside of the Azerbaijan Republic, and shall be regulated between themselves in accordance with state authorities.

The religious center and religious department may establish praying houses, cites of pilgrimages, religious educational institutions and religious brotherhoods according to the order provided by their respective charters (provisions).

Article 10. Religious educational institutions

Only a religious center and its departments have the right to establish religious educational institutions to train religious persons and personnel for other religious specialties. A religious center and its departments have no right to establish more than one higher religious educational institution. Relations between religious educational institutions and a religious center and its departments shall be regulated by constitutive documents.

Persons studying at higher and secondary spiritual educational institutions shall enjoy rights and privileges established for persons studying at state educational institutions.

Article 11. Charters (Regulations) of Religious Associations

Religious associations shall have its own charter (provision) determining its legal capability in accordance with the civil law.

The charter (provision) of religious associations shall be adopted at the believers' general meeting or at religious congresses, conferences.

Charter (provision) of a religious association shall indicate the following:

- 1) Type of confessional associations, its confessional belonging and whereabouts
- 2) Position of a religious commune in the organizational structure of a religious association
- 3) Status of assets of the religious associations
- 4) The right of religious communes to establish facilities, mass media and other religious associations and educational institutions
- 5) The order of changing and making additions to the charter (provision) of the religious associations
- 6) The order of settlement of property and other disputes in case of cessation of activity of a religious commune

Charter (provision) may also cover other matters related to peculiarities of the activity of this religious commune.

Documents determining religious activity of a religious commune and settling its other matters are not subject to registration by state bodies.

Religious commune shall be considered legal entity since the date of registration of its charter (provision).

Article 12. State Registration of Religious Associations

For the purpose of state registration of a religious commune, at least 10 age persons, who have established it, shall address a statement with enclosed protocol of constitutive assembly and Charter (provision) of the commune to a religious centre or department. Within 30 days, the religious centre or department shall submit these documents, together with written notification, to a corresponding executive body for religious affairs.

For the purpose of state registration of a religious centre, religious departments, religious educational institutions and religious brotherhoods, their respective constitutive document and charter (provision) shall be submitted to a corresponding executive body for religious affairs.

Within 30 days, corresponding executive body submits these documents, together with its conclusion, to a state body responsible for registration of legal entities.

State registration of religious communes, refusal of state registration, settlement of disputes and right to appeal to court shall be carried out in accordance with the relevant laws of the Azerbaijan Republic.

Article 13. Excluded.

Article 14. Excluded.

Article 15. Excluded.

Chapter III Status of Assets of Religious Associations

Article 16. Usage of Assets Owned by the State, Public Organizations or Citizens

Religious associations have the right to use the premises and the assets assigned to them by the state organizations, public organizations or the citizens upon mutual consent.

Local bodies of executive power and state institutions may transfer state-owned buildings of cult designation and other assets to religious communes for gratis usage.

Religious associations shall have priority rights in getting a grant of the premises of religious assignation with the surrounding territory.

Decisions on transferring buildings, cult subjects and property to religious communes shall be made no later than within one month since the date of receipt of a corresponding request, of which the applicant is notified in written form.

Religious communes shall receive lands and use them in accordance with the order established by the Land Code of the Azerbaijan Republic and other legal acts.

Article 17. Assignment and utilization of properties representing historical and cultural monuments and their use

Buildings, as well as things representing monuments of history and culture may be transferred, according to the law, to religious communes and be used by them.

Article 18. Property of religious communes

Buildings, cult articles, production facilities, public and charitable designation, monetary assets and other properties necessary to ensure activities of religious communes may be in their properties.

Religious associations have the ownership right over the assets acquired or created at their own expense, sacrificed by citizens, organizations or transferred by the state, as well as acquired according to other reasons stipulated by the law.

Religious communes may also own properties situated in abroad.

Religious communes have the right to ask for voluntary donations and also receive these donations.

The ownership right of religious communes to property shall be protected by the law.

Article 19. Production and economic activity of religious associations

Religious associations, in accordance with the legislation and their respective charters (provisions) have the right to establish publishing and printing houses, production, and restoration and building facilities with the status of legal entity, orphanages, boarding-schools, infirmaries and so on.

Incomes from production activity of religious communes and their other incomes are subject to taxation in amounts and order established by the law of the Azerbaijan Republic for facilities of public organizations.

Article 20. Instruction about the assets of terminated religious associations

The assets assigned by the state organizations, public organizations or individual citizens for utilization by religious associations without agreements shall be returned to their owners after termination of their operation.

Under cessation of activity of a religious commune, the property it owned shall be disposed in accordance with the commune's charter (provision) and existing legal provisions.

Creditors have no right to claim for property of cult designation owned by a religious commune.

In the event of absence of legal successors, the property shall pass to the state.

Chapter IV Rights of Citizens and Religious Associations on Religious Freedom

Article 21. Religious rites and rituals

For the purpose of religious prayers and assemblies, religious communes shall have the right to possess places suitable for this purpose, as well as patron of the sites of pilgrimages considered sacred according to a definite religion and use them.

Liturgies, religious rites and rituals shall be freely carried out in temples, them-owned territories, in places of pilgrimages, cemeteries, institutions of religious associations, as well as in apartments and houses of citizens.

Commandments of military divisions shall have no right (except exceptional cases) to prohibit military servants to pray and perform religious rites during their personal time. Activity of churchmen in military divisions is permitted upon commandment's consent.

In hospitals, military hospitals, old people's homes, invalids' homes, hostels and solitary confinements, people staying there shall have the right to ask for permission to make services or religious rites. The management of above-mentioned associations shall render assistance in inviting priests, partake in determining time frames and other conditions for holding liturgies, rites or rituals. In other cases, public liturgies, religious rites and rituals shall take place according to the order established for holding meetings, street meetings and demonstrations.

Religious associations have the right to address proposals concerning performing liturgies to citizens situated in hospitals, military hospitals, old people's homes and invalids' homes, hostels and prisons.

Article 22. Religious literature and articles of religious assignment

Religious associations and citizens have the right to acquire religious literature written in any language, as well as other things and materials of religious assignment and use them.

Religious associations have the right, upon consent with a corresponding executive body for religious affairs, to produce, import and freely spread literature, things of cult designation and other informational materials of religious content.

Article 23. Charitable and cultural-enlightening activity of religious associations

Religious associations shall carry out their cultural-enlightening activities independently and by means of public funds or in other forms.

Article 24. International ties and contacts of believers and religious associations

Citizens and religious associations have the right to take part in international religious events both in groups or individually, including that taking place in abroad and also have the right to be pilgrims.

Citizens' sending to abroad to be taught at religious educational institutions there, as well as invitations and exchange of religious persons are the responsibility of a religious centre or religious departments.

Chapter V Labour Activity at Religious Associations

Article 25. Labour interrelations in religious associations

Terms of labour in religious communes shall be determined in accordance with consent between a religious commune and an employee and indicated in a labour agreement to be concluded in written form.

Religious commune, in the established order, shall register the labour agreement and documents determining the terms of payment for the work of religious persons.

Citizens working for religious communes according to a labour agreement have the right to be members of a trade union.

Article 26. Labour rights of citizens working in religious associations

Legal provisions of the law on labour concerning all citizens working for religious communes according to labour agreement without exception.

Incomes of citizens, including that of religious persons obtained from the work for a religious commune, are taxable according to common provisions.

Article 27. Social maintenance and social insurance of citizens working for religious associations

Religious associations, their institutions and facilities shall make payments to the state social insurance fund and the Pension fund of the Azerbaijan Republic in the order and amounts provided for public organizations and their associations and facilities.

All citizens working for religious associations shall be paid pensions according to common provisions and in compliance with the legislation.

Chapter VI. State Bodies and Religious Associations

Article 28. Control over the law on freedom of religious belief

The law on freedom of religious belief of the Azerbaijan Republic shall be controlled in accordance with the existing legislation.

Article 29. Authoritative body of executive power for religious affairs

Authoritative body of executive power for religious affairs shall:

- render, upon request of religious associations, necessary assistance to reach agreements with state bodies and for issues requiring decision by state bodies;
- help strengthen mutual understanding, tolerance and respect of each other among religious associations of various religions;
- register, in accordance with this Law, charters (provisions) of religious associations, as well as changes and additions to them;
- help local bodies of executive power apply the legislation of freedom of religion;
- maintain connections with similar bodies in foreign states;
- create, in the Azerbaijan Republic, an information bank for religious associations and for fulfillment of the legislation of freedom of religion;
- receive necessary information from a religious centre, religious associations and other religious associations;
- promote to the participation of religious organizations in business ties with foreign confessional movements, forums, international religious centers and foreign religious associations;
- ensure the conduction of religious studies with the participation of representatives of religious associations and appropriate specialists

Article 30. Responsibility for violation of the law on freedom of religion

Executive persons and citizens guilty in violating the law on freedom of religion shall bear responsibility in accordance with the order stipulated by legal provisions of the Azerbaijan Republic.

Article 31. International agreements

If an international agreement, in which the Azerbaijan Republic takes part, establishes rules distinguished from that established by the law of the Azerbaijan Republic on freedom of religion, the rules of the international agreement shall then be applied.

Baku, August 20, 1992

Contains changes and additions of

June 7, 1996, #117-1 ГД,

November 5, 1996, #188-1 ГД,

December 27, 1996

and October 10, 1997 #380-1 ГД

P.S. In this article has been bringing some changes and additions of November 23, 2001, May 24, 2002, December 3, 2002, June 10, 2005, May 8, 2009, June 30, 2009.

Resolution of Milli Majlis of the Republic of Azerbaijan concerning Coming in Force the Law "On Freedom of Religious Belief"

Milli Majlis of the Azerbaijan Republic decides:

1. The law "On Freedom of Religion" of the Azerbaijan Republic shall enter into force since the day of promulgation
2. To instruct the Cabinet of Ministers of the Azerbaijan Republic to do the following (within two months):
 - bring legal acts of the Government of the Azerbaijan Republic in accordance with the Law "On Freedom of Religion" of the Azerbaijan Republic;
 - determine the order of provision of cult buildings and constructions, other properties and land plots to religious associations.
3. To instruct the Ministry of Justice of the Azerbaijan Republic and executive on-site bodies of power, in accordance with the terms of this law, to ensure state registration of all religious associations currently operational in the Republic.

Baku, August 20, 1992

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