



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 1: Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims

As delivered by Special Envoy Hannah Rosenthal
at the OSCE High-Level Conference on
Tolerance and non-Discrimination,
June 29, 2010

Mr. Moderator,

As the United States government's Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism, I would like to thank the OSCE and the government of Kazakhstan for hosting this conference and bringing attention to these important issues.

We welcome the opportunity to speak here today, as the problem of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims is an issue across the OSCE region. The United States strongly supports combating all forms of discrimination and intolerance against Muslims and is taking efforts to build mutual respect between people of all faiths. The U.S. government works continuously to ensure that person of all faiths, including Muslims, can freely enjoy the fundamental freedom of religion. We raise these concerns with our Allies, partners, and others – both within the OSCE and without. The U.S. Government's Annual Report on International Religious Freedom addresses these concerns in detail within the OSCE region and around the world.

In the OSCE region, for example, the free practice of Islam is severely constrained in different ways – from overt prejudices to non-support for structures that allow religious observance. In some participating States, Muslim communities have great difficulty operating mosques not controlled or sanctioned by the state, sometimes resulting in problematic penalties for this activity. In some states, in fact, one can't even build a mosque. In some states, registration systems often disproportionately burden small Muslim religious communities, and some countries' legal systems ban personal religious expression—restrictions which inevitably limit freedoms we all hold dear.

But I am not here today to name and shame. Rather, I would like to talk about how the United States has changed its entire framework for engagement with Muslim communities, and for the need to move beyond mere tolerance to partnerships based on mutual respect.

Just over one year ago in a speech in Cairo, President Obama articulated the United States' commitment to a new relationship with Muslims around the world based on mutual respect, mutual interest, and mutual responsibility; a shared commitment to universal values; and comprehensive engagement with governments and people alike.

The President pledged that the United States would make a sustained effort to engage people, as well as governments, and to listen. Since then, our government has worked tirelessly to fulfill this Presidential priority. The United States has held thousands of events and town halls with students, civil society groups, faith leaders and entrepreneurs in the United States

and around the world. Secretary Clinton and I have also held roundtables, webchats, "towninterviews," and town hall meetings to engage people worldwide, with a particular focus on engaging the next generation of Muslims around the world. Our engagement at this people-to-people level is becoming a matter of course, and what we have heard has informed our policy.

We recognize that there is not one Muslim community, but rather many different communities, each with their own nuances. Thanks to the internet and new technologies, those communities are now more interconnected than ever before. As we learned in Denmark, what happens in Copenhagen affects what happens in Kabul.

We are using the strength of the U.S. government to be a facilitator among and an intellectual partner with Muslim communities. We are bringing people to the table who do not usually come to the table. In particular, we are trying to reach out to the 45% of the world's population that is under 30 – the youth of our societies – to build lasting partnerships for the long-term. And we are identifying the best ideas and matching them with each other and the resources they need.

Fulfilling the President's vision requires a long-term effort, and there remains much to be done. While our framework may have changed, the urgency of anti-Muslim discrimination and greater engagement with Muslims everywhere has not.

And we cannot do it alone. We urge our allies and partners, and all participating States which are willing, to reach out and work with us towards our shared goals. Additionally, we continue to support the work of the Chair-in-Office Personal Representatives, High Commissioner on National Minorities, and ODIHR Tolerance Unit and welcome opportunities to assist their work in this area. I am very happy to be here in Astana today and look forward to the conference's dialogue about our and others' efforts to engage Muslim communities, to move beyond tolerance to mutual respect and understanding.

Later today, Special Representative Pandith and I will co-host a lunchtime session to launch our ART Initiative, promoting Acceptance, Respect and Tolerance. This is now taking place on the sixth floor. Six international NGOs -- representing Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Russia, Ukraine, the United Kingdom, and the United States – will share their organizations' mandates and best practices to successfully combat intolerance, particularly among youth. The discussion will focus on new and innovative initiatives that pro-actively promote pluralism, and highlight best practices of NGOs with programs that advance Acceptance, Respect, and Tolerance. The overall goal of the ART Initiative is to present successful and easily adapted approaches to combat intolerance and discrimination by involving interfaith, inter-ethnic youth and young adults.

We will be circulating information from this side event widely – enhancing the message and encouraging others to use these best practices in their communities and countries. We will post the video on the Department of State website and will provide transcripts of the session to all OSCE governments and interested NGOs. We hope to build on this event in Astana and these best practices to expand the ART Initiative with new and more innovative examples in follow up meetings and conferences, working through interfaith and inter-ethnic activities and efforts.

To date, there have been over 10 OSCE events or conferences with a focus on anti-Semitism, and more than 10 publications focusing on issues ranging from monitoring and reporting on anti-Semitic hate crimes and Holocaust remembrance to hate crimes legislation and tolerance education. We are here in Astana today to build on this body of work and to promote tolerance and non-discrimination for all. The OSCE's status as the world's largest regional security organization gives us the platform to take a courageous stand. It is my hope that years from now, we will look back on this conference as a time when we seized the moment and met great problems with even greater resolve.

Jews cannot fight anti-Semitism alone. Muslims cannot fight Islamophobia alone. Roma cannot fight – alone. The LGBT community cannot fight – alone. And the list goes on. Hate is hate, but we can overcome it together.

May I invite all of you to join us at our side event right after this session.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.