United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 6: Addressing public manifestations of intolerance, in accordance with the OSCE commitments and promoting understanding through open dialogue in the media, including the internet

As prepared for delivery by Deputy Chief of Mission Carol Fuller,
U.S. Mission to the OSCE,
to the High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
Astana, June 30, 2010

Madam Moderator,

People who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.

I suspect everyone here has heard that advice and, I hope, sees its ancient wisdom. But what does it mean in the context of the discussion we're having here today?

It means that when government representatives discuss the phenomenon of "public manifestations of intolerance," we have a responsibility to consider, first and foremost, our own role in this regard – how do we combat public manifestations of intolerance? How can we ensure that public officials are part of the solution – and not part of the problem?

Public officials must set a continuous example of tolerance and respect for all individuals within their countries. Unfortunately, we do not always live up to this high standard. For example, references by government officials to a propensity for crime based on ethnic origin, including Roma heritage, underscore that much work remains to be done. Similarly, many statements by government officials about burqas, minarets, and other items associated with Islam, risk stigmatizing and marginalizing Muslims, just as comments that are intolerant of LGBT individuals fuel societal discrimination. It is our responsibility to remember that when officials at the highest level of government use derogatory stereotypes and bigotry, that message will reverberate throughout society.

Madam Moderator, leadership matters. And if government officials are to speak to the issue of combating intolerance, we have to lead by example.

We remain concerned with the use of the internet and other media to propagate hateful ideologies. But efforts to address this problem through censorship or vague laws that purport to combat "extremism" only trade one problem for another. Moreover, such laws are often applied in a way that targets those holding dissenting political views or positions deemed unorthodox by the government.

As Secretary Clinton said in January,

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> [A]ll societies recognize that free expression has its limits. We do not tolerate those who incite others to violence, such as the agents of al-Qaida who are, at this moment, using the internet to promote the mass murder of innocent people across the world. And hate speech that targets individuals on the basis of their race, religion, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation is reprehensible. It is an unfortunate fact that these issues are both growing challenges that the international community must confront together. And we must also grapple with the issue of anonymous speech. Those who use the internet to recruit terrorists or distribute stolen intellectual property cannot divorce their online actions from their real world identities. But *these challenges must not become an excuse for governments to systematically violate the rights and privacy of those who use the internet for peaceful political purposes.* [*Emphasis added*.]

Earlier this year, a civic organization in the Czech Republic, *Romea*, held two roundtables as part of a project on investigative journalism and civil rights. The aim of the roundtables was to improve collaboration between the media, nonprofits and others interested in reporting on extremism, discrimination and minorities, including by increasing diversity in newsrooms and elsewhere in the media. We welcome this sort of non-governmental initiative which engages media professionals on these critical issues. Similarly, we commend the efforts of France's Commissioner for Diversity and Equal Opportunity Yazid Sabeg to review the status of and barriers to media diversity.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.