



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 17: Promotion of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II Forward-Looking Discussions

As prepared for delivery by Shaarik Zafar
to the OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Mr. Moderator,

The United States welcomes the opportunity to discuss ways to successfully implement our shared OSCE commitments on tolerance. The U.S. delegation also wants to express its appreciation for the good work of the Belgian Chair-in-Office in focusing his energies on this topic, through the three tolerance meetings and the Holocaust memorial ceremony in January. We look forward to similar leadership under the incoming Spanish chairmanship.

The importance of listening and having mechanisms in place to hear-out the concerns of minorities has long been evident. As the U.S. delegation noted at the Almaty conference earlier this year, various governmental agencies in the United States have developed special programs to reach out to minorities. For instance, the Department of Justice and the Department of Homeland Security hold regular roundtable meetings with representatives from Muslim-American, Arab-American and South Asian-American communities, both in Washington and throughout the country. These meetings provide an opportunity for these Americans to raise their concerns in a non-bureaucratic manner and find timely solutions to problems. For example, as a result of these meetings, both departments have published guidance on best practices while searching Muslim and Sikh Americans who wear religious head coverings. The Department of Justice also successfully litigated a case protecting the right of a Muslim American schoolgirl to wear a religious head covering in a public school. These actions are consistent with OSCE tolerance commitments regarding the right of individuals to wear religious dress, and so in this regard, we remain concerned about limitations on religious dress in some participating States.

Concerning the work of the OSCE in the tolerance field, we are pleased with ODIHR's efforts in the strengthening of ODIHR's capacity for reviewing draft legislation and assisting participating States in ensuring that national laws treat all citizens equally. We encourage participating States to pass anti-discrimination laws, and to seek the assistance of the legal advisor in the ODIHR Tolerance Program, the Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, or the ODIHR's Rule of Law unit in doing so. The ODIHR Tolerance Program already has a number of successful projects on education for Holocaust Remembrance, on police hate crimes training, and on combating anti-Semitism. Those programs should be expanded, and ODIHR and the Panel of Experts on Religious Freedom should follow them up with educational programs to combat intolerance against Muslims, Christians and other religious communities.

It is imperative that we build on the existing momentum and continue to address these problems head-on during the coming year. The United States therefore believes additional follow-up is needed and would support a Ministerial decision calling for a high level conference next year based on the Cordoba format that specifically addresses these established areas of concern, including issues of anti-Semitism. We also note the willingness of Romania to host such a conference and welcome this offer.

The unique evil of anti-Semitism continues to plague all parts of the OSCE region. This is a particularly serious issue within the spectrum of issues of intolerance and discrimination toward ethnic and religious minorities that all OSCE participating States face. We can all do more. Following the Cordoba format would ensure OSCE efforts to combat anti-Semitism are not diminished, while allowing the conference to explore answers to other pernicious ills, such as discrimination against Muslims, intolerance towards Christians and other religious groups, as well as the plight of the Roma.

A separate issue is the reappointment of the three Personal Representatives of the Chair-in-Office – a matter to be decided by the incoming Spanish chairmanship. The United States is optimistic the incoming Spanish Chair-in-Office will reappoint the three Personal Representatives with their distinct mandates, and we strongly support their reappointment. As we all remember, the purpose of the Personal Representatives is to highlight these pressing issues until the OSCE can address them more systematically and institutionally. We welcome ODIHR's plans to upgrade the Tolerance Program to a department, while maintaining the current distinct topical structure. We also look forward to the meeting Professor Weisskirchen will convene in Berlin next month on anti-Semitism, under the auspices of the Germany delegation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

In closing, Mr. Moderator, we, along with many other participating States, have denounced recent manifestations of anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, Christianophobia, anti-Romism and other intolerant acts. Unfortunately, we likely will continue to face these evils for the foreseeable future. It is important that all OSCE States work to confront and overcome such intolerance in what will be an ongoing struggle.