

# Opening Remarks

by

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at the  
OSCE High-Level Conference  
on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination



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Mr. President,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It gives me great pleasure to be here in Astana today at the High Level Conference on Tolerance. I am honored to have the opportunity to take the floor and address you here.

I first wish to acknowledge the proactive and robust fashion with which the Kazakh OSCE Chairmanship has so far this year underscored its priorities. This high-level event on tolerance and non-discrimination is a testimony to the energy and commitment with which the Chairmanship is pursuing its objectives.

This timely conference will give us the opportunity to discuss phenomena related to tolerance and mutual understanding, which are among the **key ingredients** of the OSCE's human dimension. The founders of the CSCE process were, of course, aware that tolerance and non-discrimination lay at the heart of the OSCE's security mandate. We all recall the Helsinki Final Act's emphasis on the 'inherent dignity of the individual'.

Since 2003, OSCE States have undertaken numerous and detailed commitments in the area of tolerance and non-

discrimination. They have reiterated their determination to condemn and act upon manifestations of intolerance and to **foster pluralistic and inclusive societies** where diversity is not only respected but also valued. Notably, the most recent Decision adopted by the Ministerial Council in December 2009 in **Athens** is the only international standard dealing exclusively with bias motivated violence, in an encompassing yet detailed manner.

In a globalized world where threats are inter-connected, no single violent and abhorrent manifestation of intolerance can be ignored. Every single incident bears the potential of escalation. Consequently, no security agenda can be successful if it does not **tackle manifestations of intolerance** even if they are on a so-called 'low-level'. We must ensure that all actors involved - States, civil society, the private sector and international organizations - **assume their responsibilities** to turn good words into good and concrete deeds.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

This conference is timely because over the past few years, the issue of tolerance has gained greater importance universally in light of the recent challenges that multicultural and multi-ethnic societies have faced in the OSCE region. Indeed, tolerance has

been promoted as a way to address some of the fundamental differences in society. It has been said many times that notions of tolerance and respect may offer solution to many deep-seated tensions in a number of participating States.

Consequently, we have seen a number of promising, proactive governmental initiatives. Police services have been trained to be more responsive; multicultural educational tools have been developed to tackle intolerance in schools; hate crimes data is now collected and systematically analysed. These initiatives not only promote tolerance but also firmly **embed** the principles of mutual understanding in social and cultural structures of participating States.

These initiatives are indicators of the political will of participating States to encourage the plurality of perspectives, choices, and opinions. It also confirms that fundamental rights and freedoms are universal, indivisible and interdependent.

However, this also presents States with a responsibility. **Any discourse on the respect for individual choices and opinions must at the same time endorse the position that every individual is entitled to a number of fundamental freedoms.** The provision of human rights is, in my view, a precondition for notions of respect and mutual understanding to unfold their essence. To put it bluntly: it is not an achievement to 'tolerate' members of our society who do not

have the right to freely speak their mind or enjoy the panoply of other rights that should be available in a democratic society.

More concretely I mean that freedom of expression, freedom of association and freedom of religion or belief are **absolutely crucial in the pursuit of tolerance** and mutual understanding in society. It is encouraging to see that participating States have reiterated their commitment to tolerance, and therefore these fundamental rights, in a series of OSCE Ministerial Decisions over the past three years.

I will not deny that values of tolerance and human rights can sometimes conflict. Take the careful balance that States seek to strike on issues of freedom of expression and ensuring security for all their citizens. This can be seen in the recent troubling phenomenon of hate and intolerant speech on the Internet. In combating this problem, States must take a nuanced approach so as to safeguard freedom of expression and ensuring that policies do not curtail this fundamental right.

ODIHR has been mandated to support participating States in their efforts to implement their commitments. Our support is twofold:

- monitoring and reporting on hate-motivated crimes and incidents; and
- designing and implementing technical assistance programs in the area of legislation, law enforcement, data collection

and education.

I am pleased to note that an increasing number of States is requesting our support. Our legislative reviews are in demand, our capacity building programmes are being sought, our guides are being translated and used, and our teaching materials adapted and adopted across the region.

Our annual report on hate crime in the OSCE region, for instance, reveals that progress has been made by several States through efforts to strengthen legislation and the response by law enforcement, and through intensifying educational programmes to promote mutual respect and understanding.

It is my hope that this conference will allow us to reflect deeper upon the interdependence between the values of tolerance, rule of law and human rights.

Thank you.