

**OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting
Policies and Strategies to Further Promote Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
Vienna, 14-15 April 2016**

**Session II: Education and Awareness-Raising to Prevent Intolerance and
Discrimination, including Hate Crimes, Hate Speech and Hate on the Internet**

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Education is one of the key ways to promote religious tolerance and non-discrimination since it addresses the roots of the phenomenon. Mingling with students belonging to different religions is in itself a great help to understand the unity of the humankind. Moreover, it is important that school teaches about different religions and permits to each student to manifest and tell her or his belief. Knowledge about the other's religion can reduce harmful misunderstanding and stereotypes.

Educational programmes should be developed and strengthened in order to promote a better understanding and respect for different cultures, ethnicities and religions. The education to respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms is not less important, both for students at all level as well as for those attending military, police and public service schools.

Interreligious dialogue and dialogue between religious communities and participating States are other important means in order to promote greater tolerance, respect and understanding between believers of different communities and believers and non-believers, as well as to ensure the stability and security of our democratic societies. Let me remark that interreligious dialogue is properly speaking an internal matter of religious communities, which should be free to decide if and when start this dialogue as well as to decide with which communities and on which issues conduct it, while the dialogue between religious communities and governmental bodies has different premises and goals, since it is aimed to achieve a better understanding of the requirements or positions of religious communities.

In this respect participating States are called upon, on one hand, to create an atmosphere of tolerance and appreciation of religions and beliefs within which religious and belief communities can engage in full and fruitful dialogue and, on the other hand, to foster the participation of religious and belief communities in a constructive public discourse.

I would also underline the interrelation and interdependence of these forms of dialogue and the right of religious communities to be included in public dialogue and debate, even

through the mass media, in accordance with the Principle 16 of Vienna 1989 Concluding Document and Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/13.

One of the main obstacles to the dialogue between religions and with religions are certain expressions, which create and reinforce patterns of intolerance and discrimination. As we all know, there is no *consensus* at international level about how, and exactly where, the frontiers of freedom of expression should be drawn but, anyway, participating States have an interest to find an appropriate balance between the right to hold and express an opinion on one side, and the aim to facilitate a respectful dialogue between religious communities on the other side. Therefore they should be encouraged to create an atmosphere of mutual respect through a suitably narrow notion of incitement that will allow some regulation and even criminalization, but that will continue to allow robust discussion that sometimes may shock and offend.

If it is difficult to draw a legal limitation, anyway every person should be encouraged to exercise responsibly her or his freedom of expression, with due consideration for the believers' feelings. In particular the media have the responsibility to promote knowledge and understanding of religions, to give a fair and accurate account of religious beliefs and to ensure that members of religious communities are given the chance to express their own views. To this end, the Representative on the Freedom of the Media and the ODIHR may develop specific guidelines for voluntary professional standards and self-regulation.

A special attention should be paid to the Internet, and especially to the social networks, which play a big role in spreading disparagement of, or incitement against religions and religious communities as well as in showing irreverent treatment or provocative portrayal of religious symbols. Internet service providers and social networking services should be encouraged to adopt standard form contracts providing termination clauses and penalties in case of intolerant conducts of people using their services.

All these measures will allow the public opinion to develop in a correct, mature way and they will foster a climate of mutual confidence and respect between religious communities as well as between believers and non-believers.