



## **Statement by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

### **Plenary Session 5: Education to promote mutual respect and understanding, remembrance of the Holocaust, and inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue**

#### **OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding**

**Bucharest, 08 June 2007**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Hate-motivated crime is often the result of negative stereotypes, often passed from generation to generation; therefore, educational efforts aimed at promoting mutual respect and understanding and an appreciation of cultural, religious, ethnic and other forms of diversity can help eliminate such attitudes. In increasingly diverse societies in the OSCE region it is necessary that children and youth develop skills to understand, appreciate and value the diversity they experience. In order to address the root causes of hatred, intolerance and prejudice, educational strategies are needed that aim to combat all forms of discrimination and to foster respect and mutual understanding.

The OSCE has emphasized the importance of education in a number of commitments highlighting the need to promote mutual respect and understanding through awareness-raising and educational programmes.

While a number of participating States have undertaken such efforts, more long-term and coherent approaches are needed to have a real impact.

To support OSCE States in implementing their commitments, the ODIHR has initiated a project on diversity education aimed at the development of long-term strategies to tackle prejudice and racist attitudes amongst young people. Within the project, an assessment of educational strategies and initiatives on diversity education in school settings throughout the OSCE region was conducted on the basis of information provided by the OSCE participating States<sup>1</sup> and resulted in a form of country-specific reports summarising the overall situation in relation to diversity education. Comprehensive recommendations covering aspects of curricula development, teaching material, teacher training, quality standards in education and strategic planning have also been developed. These recommendations will be published in English and Russian at the end of 2007.

According to the information submitted by the countries, a number of OSCE States have undertaken specific measures to address and prevent prejudice and racist attitudes among young people in schools.

- A number of countries, such as Sweden, Slovenia and Norway, have taken proactive steps to tackle the problem of exclusion, discrimination, and hate crimes in society in a long-term prospective through the development and implementation of National Action Plans on diversity education.
- Good practical tools on diversity education can be found in Germany where the nation-wide project 'Learning and living democracy' is implemented. Students are taught about extremist right wing groups and their political philosophy, and how this can

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<sup>1</sup> 51 out of 56 OSCE participating States provided requested information

threaten democracy. This is combined with action projects which involve teachers, students, parents, neighbourhood organisations, as well as NGOs.

- Countries with histories that include periods of tension and conflicts with neighbouring countries, or between ethnic or linguistic groups are looking for practical tools of handling such situations in a sensitive and constructive manner instead of promoting stereotyping of certain ethnic groups or neighbouring countries. The Irish “education for reconciliation” project provides an example of how sensitive issues can be successfully approached in conflict areas.
- In a number of countries such as Netherlands, France and Norway, teachers receive professional training in conflict mediation and violence prevention to deal with conflict between students of different backgrounds.
- More than half of OSCE States include components of diversity education within the system of professional development or in-service training for teachers, which is an important precondition for implementation of national strategies to combat intolerance in the school system. Ireland established teacher support teams made up of teachers with expertise in certain areas of diversity education, who provide both in-school and regional training and support to teachers in relation to content and methodologies.
- The majority of participating States cooperate with NGOs to implement projects on diversity education. This includes both teacher training and implementation of the extra-curricular activities in the schools.
- A number of countries developed practical tools for assessment of diversity education. Evaluation mechanisms on the social progress made by students as used in Sweden might provide a model for other countries.

At the same time, the majority of the OSCE participating states lack long-term and structural approaches to fostering diversity education in the public school system as well as practical tools to address their educational needs. These gaps could be addressed by international support and exchange of experience. As indicated in the information provided by the states, 37 countries expressed interest in receiving further support on diversity education from the ODIHR; 34 countries are interested to exchange expertise and best practise amongst the participating States.

To respond these needs the ODIHR is developing bi-lateral support mechanisms for the OSCE participating states. A pilot project on human rights and diversity education was initiated at the request of education authorities in Azerbaijan.

In response to a rise in anti-Semitism throughout the OSCE region, OSCE participating States, under the Berlin Declaration and the 2004 Ministerial Council Decision, committed themselves to strengthen educational programmes for combating anti-Semitism and for promoting remembrance of and education about the tragedy of the Holocaust.

In order to assist participating States in their efforts to strengthen education about the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, the ODIHR assessed initiatives that already exist across the OSCE region and identified gaps in both fields. One main gap identified in the ODIHR study: *Overview and Analysis of Approaches to Education on the Holocaust and on Anti-Semitism* is the lack of appropriate teaching material and educational tools.

In order to respond to this need, the ODIHR, together with Yad Vashem in Israel and 12 national experts has developed concrete tools for educators, such as the suggestions for educators on the commemoration of Holocaust memorial days. This online document is already available in 13 languages for the OSCE region. It has been adopted by the United Nations Department for Public Information and has been distributed to all UN Public Information Centers world wide. The ODIHR and Yad Vashem record several hundred downloads from our websites in each language each month.

Another innovative tool for educators is country specific teaching material on contemporary anti-Semitism. In cooperation with Anne Frank House Amsterdam and national experts, teaching materials on anti-Semitism have been developed in seven special country adaptations, based on historical and social background of each country have been developed by the ODIHR. The “ready to use” material gives detailed information, graphics and assignments for the students comes in three parts and will be accompanied by a teachers guide. (Part 1 is on the history of Anti-Semitism, part 2 on contemporary forms of Anti-Semitism and part 3 puts Anti-Semitism into perspective with other forms of discrimination). This material is now available for the upcoming school year for those countries and implementation into the school system has started in several of those countries already. Currently the second phase of the project is underway with the development of adaptations for three more participating States.

In the OSCE region, and indeed in many other parts of the world, it is becoming increasingly obvious that a better understanding about religion is needed. Misunderstandings, stereotypes, and caricatures about others are leading in many cases to heightened antagonism and sometimes even violence. To address this problem, the ODIHR Advisory Council on Freedom of Religion or Belief is preparing *Guiding*

*Principles on Teaching about Religion at State Schools in the OSCE Region.* The Guidelines will offer practical guidance for preparing curricula for teaching about religion, preferred procedures for assuring fairness in the structuring of curricula, and standards for how they could be implemented. The project is designed to assist educators who are preparing curricula for the teaching of religion in state schools to ensure that teaching about different religions is carried out in a fair and balanced manner.

Finally, I would like to note that TANDIS – the ODIHR’s Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Information System has a special Education corner divided into 3 headings: diversity education, education on anti-Semitism, and Holocaust education. The corner is intended to gather relevant information for educators, decision makers and others. The corner gives access to practical initiatives, teaching material, international standards, and policy documents.