

OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND
NON-DISCRIMINATION

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**Session 5: The role of education to promote mutual understanding and respect for
diversity according to OSCE commitments**

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The Armenian people have traditionally maintained highest regard for education as a path to the future and a key to the past which helps preserve its identity through learning of its history, culture and traditions, and shape the future through lessons-learnt from that past.

It comes as no surprise that the right to education is fully guaranteed in Armenia irrespective of ethnicity, race, sex, language, religion, political or other views. Basic general education is compulsory, secondary education at state educational institutions is free of charge. There is also an opportunity for free education on competitive basis at technical and vocational secondary educational institutions, as well as at higher educational institutions.

In the field of public education, importance is attached to improving the education of children with special educational needs. In 2005, being the first country in the region, the Government approved the Concept for Inclusive Education specifying the key issues of organizing such education, and is effectively implementing the policy of inclusive education.

Armenia pays great attention to education in human rights, considering it as an important factor contributing to the development of democracy. Since 2001, Human Rights is included in the curriculum of public schools as a separate educational subject with classes allocated to the study of issue of tolerance and non-discrimination. Currently all textbooks are undergoing a review through tolerance-based approach.

Education is indispensable in promoting mutual respect and understanding as key pillars for social cohesion in a pluralistic society. Equally important in this respect is to provide for equal opportunities and access to all levels of education for national minorities and foster the knowledge and appreciation of the cultural, traditional and religious specificities of those minorities in general public through intercultural initiatives and awareness-raising campaigns. Continuous contribution to the preservation, dissemination and development of the cultural heritage and the culture of the national minorities is one of the priorities of the cultural policy of Armenia also reflected in 2008-2012 Action Plan of the Government. The Armenian Government strongly supports the creation of text-books for national minorities to enable their education in their mother tongue. In 2005 the ABC for the Assyrian minority was created, and for the last several years work is carried out on the creation and publication of Yezidi textbooks.

To the effect of fostering cultural diversity and mutual understanding in the country, multiplicity of cultural and educational events are organized with state support with the participation of all representatives of national minorities residing in Armenia. Special events are organized in the army where a representative of a national minority serves to get the others more aware of the traditions, culture and beliefs of the national minority. These events alongside with traditional celebrations get widest possible coverage in the Armenian broadcast and print media.

In this overall context of fighting intolerance and discrimination, special attention should be paid to combating prejudices and stereotypes and prevention of hate crimes. Education and awareness-raising on the past atrocities, like genocides of the 20th century, recalling and remembering those painful lessons through dissemination of information and including them in the school curricula could become the most powerful tool in this struggle through embedding the inadmissibility of such egregious violations in minds and hearts of the growing generations. In its 2006 Brussels ministerial decision the OSCE participating states acknowledged the need “to address the root-causes of intolerance and discrimination by encouraging the development of comprehensive domestic education policies and strategies as well as through increased awareness-raising measures that: ...promote remembrance and education about the tragedy of the Holocaust, as well as other genocides...” The OSCE participating states should also agree on a common legislative basis which would establish responsibility for denying the crime of genocide and other crimes against humanity.

While we stress the importance of education, we would be remiss if we do not condemn such deplorable policies as the revision of history with a clear intent of vilification of the other, and erasing all hints of the latter’s existence and the contribution to that country and society, brain-washing the growing generation with fabricated history full of hate propaganda, or ordering thematic competitions for the students on denial of genocide. The gravity of the situation has to be underlined and vigorous steps undertaken to combat it as it poisons the minds of current and future generations leading to further alienation and mistrust between nations. It has not only social and psychological implications by imbedding intolerance and extremist ideologies into the growing generation but also security ones as it creates a fertile ground for recruitment and misuse of such people for terrorism and mercenary purposes. We have already witnessed the grave effects of such continuous hate propaganda when an Armenian young man was brutally murdered in his sleep by an Azerbaijani colleague during a NATO training in Europe. And the irony is that the latter was successfully glorified in his home country as a clear demonstration of the intent of such state-backed policies.

In this respect we would like to make the following recommendations:

- Take all necessary measures to eradicate dissemination of national hatred through tolerance-based education and policies,
- To condemn revision of history and vilification of a national group in all its forms and manifestations, including through assessment of policies and methods used in school education,
- To combat denial of genocide and crimes against humanity and task ODIHR to collect data on such instances to enable full understanding of its social and psychological implications and elaboration of special policies to fight against this phenomenon.