



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Address by the Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on Combatting Discrimination and Promoting Tolerance

As delivered by Ambassador James S. Gilmore III
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 10, 2020

The United States welcomes to the Permanent Council the Chair-in-Office's *Personal Representatives on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination*: Rabbi Andrew Baker, Ambassador Mehmet Paçacı, and Professor Regina Polak. Thank you for coming to speak to us today. I particularly am pleased to hear from Rabbi Baker, who I consider a personal friend and with whom I spent a great deal of time at the anti-Semitism conference in Tirana earlier this year.

The United States welcomes the opportunity to state the position of our country on these issues of tolerance. The *Helsinki Final Act* commits us to respect the "inherent dignity of the human person." The United States strongly condemns crimes motivated by hatred and intolerance. No one should fear becoming the target of crime because of who they are, how they look, what they believe, how they worship, or with whom they share their affections.

Across the OSCE region, violence against religious believers is on the rise as has been discussed here today. We were shocked by the November attacks on innocent bystanders right here in downtown Vienna. We were also deeply saddened by the October attack against Christians in Nice, France. Such a heinous act makes clear the need for further dialogue among religious communities to ensure mutual respect and an absolute requirement of tolerance for each other in our religious beliefs.

We are also concerned about laws and proposals in European parliaments to limit the religious freedom of Jews and Muslims. For example, the Flemish region of Belgium passed a law outlawing religious ritual animal slaughter in the Muslim and Jewish faith and communities. Parliaments in Europe are also debating outlawing male ritual circumcision. Male circumcision is a near universal practice among religious and secular Jews dating back more than 3,000 years; its ban would be an attack on Jewish religious freedoms and directed toward a specific community within their country.

Anti-Semitism continues to increase across the OSCE region. Anti-Semitism often serves as a bellwether for broader intolerance and prejudice against any community or individual perceived as "different" or "other." We recall the 2004 *Berlin Document* stating that anti-Semitism and intolerance *as a whole* threaten democracy, cultural values, and our collective security. Anti-Semitism is an age-old hatred, but it constantly evolves and is deliberately propagated by both state and non-state actors, who misuse new technologies to move their hateful narratives with unprecedented speed and reach, targeting Jewish persons, places of worship, and property. No country is immune, including our own. We must all reject anti-Semitism in its age-old and contemporary manifestations and we call on all participating States that have not yet done so to

embrace the *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance* working definition of anti-Semitism. The working definition is an important tool that helps us identify anti-Semitism in all of its ugly forms, so we can more effectively combat it.

Other forms of intolerance are also on the rise. We do not support or tolerate discrimination against those of the Muslim faith and condemn violence against Muslim citizens of all of our countries. Some governments also prohibit Muslim religious communities from building mosques or community centers, restrict Muslim religious prayer, and even Muslim majority countries, sometimes, will imprison followers of “non-traditional” Muslim sects in their countries. These practices are inconsistent with our OSCE commitments on religious freedom and tolerance. Governments across the OSCE region impose undue limitations on religious practices, often under the pretext of combating the coronavirus pandemic or countering “extremism.” Russia, in particular, continues its campaign of persecution of Jehovah’s Witnesses and other religious communities for their peaceful religious practice despite our constant statements on behalf of religious freedom in Russia, and Russia’s assertions, including today, of the protection of those of the Christian faith.

More must be done to prevent and deter human rights violations and abuses against LGBTI persons. Such attacks should roundly be condemned, and they should be fully investigated and those responsible held accountable. We reject assertions from any participating State that OSCE principles and commitments on respect for human rights and the inherent dignity of the human being do not apply to members of this community. All persons are equal in rights and dignity.

We note with concern that persons of African descent and Roma/Sinti continue to be targets of hate and discrimination across the OSCE region.

We welcome the *International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance*’s recently adopted definition of Anti-Roma Racism and we urge all participating States to put it into practice. The United States encourages the OSCE to do more to combat racial discrimination by harnessing the strength of its institutional experts. We welcome your ideas on how we can strengthen our actions with this goal in mind.

The United States rigorously prosecutes hate crimes. I have seen it myself in federal and state courtrooms. Swift responses to hate crimes send the signal they are unacceptable, anytime, anywhere. We collect data on the incidents of hate crimes, which helps decision-makers formulate more effective responses. We strongly urge all OSCE states to collect and share their data of incidents of hate crimes with the *Hate Crimes Unit* at ODIHR.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, measures to combat the coronavirus pandemic must be based on science and medical need, not based on stereotypes and the use for scapegoating. No ethnic group should be singled out and discriminated against based upon race or ethnicity, since race and ethnicity is not the source of the spread of the pandemic.

Mr. Chair, the United States will be prepared to discuss our own national challenges in combatting intolerance and discrimination. We will not hesitate to examine concerns in other countries as well as our own. We remain committed to working with the OSCE, governments, businesses, faith communities, and civil society groups across the region to condemn and combat all forms of hatred and promote respect for all human rights of all.

The U.S. was likewise disappointed to see the participating States were unable to come together to support a strong Decision on *Enhancing Efforts to Address Intolerance and Discrimination* in this

past Ministerial, which is somewhat puzzling, but we hope we can reach consensus in 2021. You can be assured of the United States good offices in reaching this decision in future Ministerials.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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