

**Statement of State Secretary Ms. Lise Bergh  
Ministry of Justice, Sweden**

**On the occasion of the OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and  
other  
forms of Intolerance, Cordoba, 8 - 9 June 2005**

Mr. Chairman,

The problem of intolerance is complex and takes several different forms – anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Ziganism, xenophobia, homophobia and discrimination. Nevertheless, I think we need to start this session with reflecting on ourselves.

We all have different sides to our personality and our identity. One person is a woman, a Muslim and born in Sweden. Another person is a Christian woman, an immigrant and a heterosexual. A third person is a man of no particular religious faith, and a homosexual. And a fourth is a Swedish Jew, and the fifth is Roma.

In spite of all these different facets and sides of our identities – or precisely *because* of these different sides – we feel like complete persons. If we have to hide one aspect of ourselves, we feel impeded both inside and in our relation to others.

In the same way, harassment, discrimination or intolerance directed to one side of our identity threatens our whole personality.

Mr. Chairman,

I am convinced that different persons experience intolerance and discrimination much in the same way, regardless of our other characteristics. Intolerance has many expressions and forms, but is deeply humiliating for each one of its victims. Therefore, we must look at the different expressions of intolerance and discrimination as being, essentially, the same problem. Intolerance directed at one group of the population should also be considered as an attack on the whole of society.

If we fail to recognize this, our enemies have won an important victory. We cannot deal with intolerance, we cannot fight the threats, if we do not unite.

Likewise, society needs to deal with different expressions of intolerance and discrimination at their common core and to a large extent with the same tools. Even if it is a primary concern to prevent and counteract the acts of intolerance, in the longer perspective we must focus on the ignorance and the fear of the unknown that seem to be the root of all intolerance. This means increasing knowledge about different

religions and cultures, about human rights and not the least changing prejudiced attitudes, and all are central elements in the struggle against intolerance.

Another crucial task is to be very precise and careful about the signals sent by us who represent governmental power. We may never lower ourselves to playing the cards of intolerance and xenophobia in election campaigns, in the media, or indeed at all. And why should we? It is obvious that a society that uses all its resources in terms of varieties, experiences, competence and knowledge is richer and stronger than one that leaves parts of its assets aside.

I believe firmly that the only possible way for democratic society in a world of increasing internationalisation, migration and diversity is towards openness, pluralism and inclusiveness.

Finally, we should not stop at addressing the expressions of intolerance coming from private persons and associations. We also have to examine the mechanisms of exclusion and discrimination that may be built into the official structures and institutions of society. If we expect the public to reject discrimination and intolerance, society's own institutions, including the political sphere, need to embrace and reflect the varieties of the population.

And lastly, I would like to thank you, Minister Moratinos, not only for hosting this conference but also for highlighting the importance of introducing the gender perspective into our work.

Thank you.