



SUPPLEMENTARY HUMAN DIMENSION MEETING
Freedom of religion or Belief, fostering mutual respect and understanding
Vienna, July 2 - 3 2015
Closing Statement of Switzerland

Ladies and Gentlemen

Switzerland thanks the Serbian Chairmanship and ODIHR for the organisation of this second supplementary human dimension meeting. I would also like to thank the key note speaker Dr Yevgeny Zhovtis and all the panellists for their interesting and important contributions to the discussions we had in the last 1.5 days.

As a strong defender of dialogue and cooperation, Switzerland calls on all participating States to promote the peaceful coexistence of different cultures, religions and faiths. In this context, Switzerland strongly condemns all forms of incitement to religious hatred. Hatred begets hatred and violence begets violence which is why only dialogue can be the solution.

Freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief for all is an integral part of Swiss human rights policy. Our commitment to human rights should not only be understood as the respect of our obligations under international law but as the main pillar of the Swiss Constitution and to a larger extent the respect of the Swiss tradition. The peaceful coexistence and respect between different religious, linguistic and cultural groupings are specific and fundamental values of my country.

The promotion of the right to freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief is also a key element in the prevention and conflict resolution policy of Switzerland. My country is committed to the elimination of all forms of discrimination, including those based on religion or belief, and takes every opportunity to reaffirm its position. Switzerland participates actively in the relevant international organizations such as the UN, the Council of Europe and the OSCE in view of protecting and promoting religious freedom and preventing any form of religious intolerance. Within the framework of our bilateral political consultations, we also regularly discuss violations against ethnic and religious minorities.

Since 2004, Switzerland has been working as part of its global peace activity for the promotion of peaceful coexistence between people with different worldviews and for the peaceful solution of conflict as well as religious and political differences. Switzerland is convinced that practical and specific cooperation is the best way to tackle the daily challenges of the coexistence of diverse cultures and religions. Cooperation on specific projects contributes to build trust. It creates shared positive experiences on the basis of which dialogue and intensive cooperation can take place.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Switzerland fully supports the activities of the OSCE and especially ODIHR in this framework. Implementation of commitments is essential to advance human rights in the OSCE area and lies at the core of the priorities of the Swiss human rights policy. Because of the existing gaps, Switzerland has repeatedly called on all participating States to fully implement OSCE commitments, including those on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief. Let me recall the Ministerial Decision on freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief adopted in Kyiv in December 2013. More can be done for an effective progress in implementation. Switzerland will continue to support ODIHR and encourages participating States to seek its assistance to improve our records. Last year, Switzerland arranged for the presentation of the guidelines for review of legislation pertaining to the recognition of religious or belief communities prepared by ODIHR and the Venice Commission. We also welcome the Advisory Panel of experts on Freedom of religion or belief which assists ODIHR in its work in this field and give it more visibility.

Finally, let me underline the crucial role played by the civil society, interreligious councils, and religious leaders in the protection and promotion of freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief and its effective implementation on the ground. Promoting a dialogue with these actors is part of our action. In this spirit, we have been working actively with the European Council of Religious Leaders and hosted their annual meeting last year in Geneva. Switzerland calls on all participating States as well as all religious and civil society leaders alike to speak out to prevent sectarian violence and to promote tolerance and mutual respect.

Thank you.