



United States Mission to the OSCE

Opening Plenary: Combating intolerance and discrimination in the OSCE area. Implementation of the relevant OSCE commitments

As prepared for delivery by the United States delegation
to the OSCE Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Conference,
Tirana, Albania, May 21, 2013

The United States applauds the Chairman in Office for giving priority to the compelling need to combat intolerance and discrimination in the OSCE region, and we are grateful to the Government of Albania for hosting this important meeting. Intolerance and discrimination against members of minority groups are not unique to the OSCE region. This is a global concern.

Advancing tolerance and non-discrimination goes to the core of our commitments to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms and the dignity of the human person. How effectively we meet Tolerance and Non-discrimination challenges also has profound implications for the healthy development of our societies, democratic government, rule of law and security among states.

OSCE participating States have adopted some thirteen Ministerial and Summit documents that include TND commitments. Yet we continue to see a rise in prejudice, discrimination, and violence in the region against members of racial, ethnic and religious minorities and migrant populations, persons with disabilities, and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Roma Action Plan and the OSCE's first Conference on Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination. 2014 will mark not only the tenth anniversary of the establishment of the OSCE's Tolerance Unit, but also the adoption of the seminal Berlin Declaration on combating anti-Semitism.

Commemoration of these anniversaries will mean little if we do not use them as occasions to spur action.

We are all aware that last year's Ministerial Decision on Combating Racism and Xenophobia failed, amidst attempts by some participating States to water down existing commitments. Participating States were unable in a timely manner to reach agreement on holding this meeting in Tirana as well as on an agenda for it. The delay has already had a negative impact on high level government participation here as well as on the ability of civil society activists and human rights defenders, experts, and practitioners to contribute to our discussions.

Many participating States also continue to underutilize the very Tolerance Unit we created to assist in meeting our commitments. Many States still lack adequate legislation to address hate crimes, and fail to collect meaningful hate crimes data or report their findings to ODIHR.

This meeting offers an opportunity for us to review where each of us stands in implementing our commitments and begin to shape the tolerance and non-discrimination agenda for OSCE for the next decade.

For our part, as is the case with other participating States, the United States is an increasingly diverse society. Living up to our motto: E pluribus unum -- From the many, One -- presents growing challenges. We know that our national success will depend on our meeting them.. The Constitution of the United States promises equal justice under the law and freedom for all. The Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice enforces laws designed to give meaning to that promise. We see every day that, despite the great progress we have made as a nation, longstanding civil rights challenges endure. At the same time, new challenges have emerged as America changes and grows. Today the Civil Rights Division works to address challenges old and new, bringing 21st century tools to bear to combat discrimination in all its forms.

During the conference, my delegation looks forward to sharing some of the efforts we are making domestically and through our bilateral assistance to advance tolerance and non-discrimination, including through political leadership, the justice system, education, and partnership with civil society.

All individuals must have the chance to participate in the social, economic and political lives of their countries and contribute to the well being of the international community. Commerce and growth flourish, instability declines, and nations are enriched and uplifted when states work to include marginalized populations and draw on the talents of their entire societies.