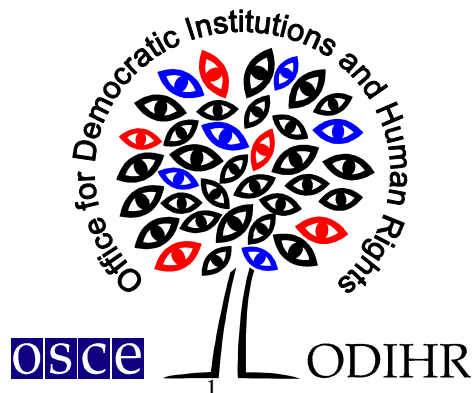


Speech by Ambassador Christian Strohal  
Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic  
Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)

At the  
4th Stockholm International Forum Conference on

**Preventing Genocide**  
Threats and Responsibilities

Stockholm, 27-28 January 2004



Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The topic chosen for this year's Conference - the focus on prevention - is an aspect that has too often been disregarded. But recurrent incidences and threats of genocide in our day and age show how much needs to be done and how little we truly know about how insufficient our efforts to prevent genocide remain.

The OSCE, with its unique approach to promoting stability in Europe by adopting a comprehensive approach to promoting security, has been working on concrete ways to prevent all forms of conflict and to address threats to security in a comprehensive manner.

In this respect, I am glad that my colleague Ambassador Rolf Ekeus, who, as High Commissioner on National Minorities, makes important and invaluable contributions to the OSCE's conflict prevention activities, is here today. Protecting the rights and promoting the participation of minorities in political processes is indeed an important measure in preventing ethnic strife from emerging.

The work of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights attempts to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity, concentrating on what we call the human dimension.

Allow me at this point to highlight some of the very practical activities my institution is undertaking to safeguard human security in our region.

The **promotion of tolerance and the fight against discrimination** is one of the pillars of our ongoing activities in fighting new threats to security and stability. Following the decisions taken by the 55 Foreign Ministers of the OSCE participating States in Maastricht last year, we will be stepping up efforts in **combating manifestations of aggressive nationalism, racism, chauvinism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, and all forms of discrimination**. I need not explain that it is the emergence of such phenomena that can lead to violent incidents, so-called hate crimes and aggression, directed towards individual groups, whether they originate from individuals or are sponsored by the state.

Currently, the OSCE is preparing three conferences aimed at addressing anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, and discrimination, as well as how to address the propagation of hate speech on the Internet

- Conference on Anti-Semitism, 28-29 April, Berlin
- Special meeting on the relationship between racist, xenophobic, and anti-Semitic propaganda on the Internet and hate crimes, 16-17 June, Paris
- Conference on tolerance and the fight against racism, xenophobia, and discrimination, 13-14 September, Brussels

Among other things, these conferences will help us in the collection of information and, in particular, of good practices seen as effective against such phenomena. Strong and systematic follow-up will be needed to make these conferences a lasting contribution in our fight to prevent discrimination and hate crimes.

The OSCE/ODIHR strongly co-operates with civil society to provide information on the emergence of intolerance. Next to field missions of international organizations and other international presences, it is grassroots NGOs with staff sufficiently trained to identify such phenomena that often act as the most far-reaching early-warning mechanism. To strengthen this mechanism, we must ensure that civil society can operate in an environment in which its activities are not willfully curtailed. Moreover, the provision of adequate training to help NGOs in identifying all forms of discrimination and training in methods of reporting on incidents further enhance the efficiency of such early-warning mechanisms, allowing the international community to receive timely information on the existence of potential conflict situations.

Once potential threats have been identified, effective forms of preventive action must be found. In addressing discrimination from the state, it is important to assist the affected groups themselves, in particular non-governmental organizations, in making use of national as well as international mechanisms of redress, in particular courts. Here again, the international community, as well as individual states, are called on to support civil society.

An important example of where such empowerment is needed are the many Roma and Sinti communities spread out throughout Europe and often faced with open discrimination in public life, as well as numerous incidents of violence and hate crimes directed against them. In the context of this Conference, the fourth of a series of Conferences dealing with the Holocaust, it is particularly pertinent to reflect on the plight of the many Roma and Sinti, who, almost sixty years after persecution by the Nazi regime in Germany, still face discrimination and racially motivated violence throughout our region.

The Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues established in our office aims to act as a clearing house for all related legislation in OSCE participating States, while working to bring representatives of Roma and Sinti NGOs together with authorities in participating States. Moreover, training programmes are in place to make Roma and Sinti groups more effective and their participation in democratic processes more active (e.g., the project “Roma, use your ballots wisely”). We also continue to collect data to assist states in the elaboration of new policies in this area.

Finally, all our work in the field of strengthening the rule of law and democratic governance in our region is aimed at providing citizens with a form of government in which they can place their trust, with an accountable government and strong institutions. Without effective protection of human rights, there is no security; without protection of human rights, threats will always remain.

It is when citizens, and in particular groups in danger of being discriminated against, can trust their governments to safeguard these rights rather than having to fear their own governments that such atrocities as we have seen in the past can be avoided.

I look forward to the exchange of views and experiences during this Conference and beyond. The OSCE region bears crucial responsibilities: responsibilities to ensure that lessons from the past are learnt and responsibilities to ensure future generations are taught. These are responsibilities on which we must act.