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**STATEMENT BY MR. MICHEL GOFFIN,
DEPUTY DIRECTOR GENERAL OF THE DIRECTORATE GENERAL
FOR MULTILATERAL AFFAIRS AND GLOBALIZATION, AT THE
OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND
NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Astana, 29 and 30 June 2010

**Plenary session 5: The role of education to promote mutual understanding
and respect for diversity according to the existing OSCE commitments**

Mr. Moderator,

I am delighted that one of the sessions of this Conference should be devoted to the subject of education. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights invites States to take the necessary measures to ensure that teaching and education serve to promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

It is in large part through education that our children learn to be aware of and respect the diversity that exists in our societies. Teaching can enable them to understand and respect this diversity, free of all prejudices. Thus education should have the aim of forming citizens who are ready to respect all members of society, including also – and in particular – homosexual, bisexual and transgender persons.

For centuries, and even still today, homosexual, bisexual and transgender persons have been victims of serious forms of intolerance such as homophobia and transphobia, and of numerous forms of discrimination, even within their own families.

Human rights are universal and must apply to every individual, without any distinction. No cultural, traditional or religious value nor any precept issuing from a “dominant culture” can be invoked to justify criminalization, hate speech or any other forms of discrimination, including those based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

States must therefore take all appropriate measures, including programmes of education, teaching and training, to seek to eliminate prejudices and discriminatory attitudes or conduct based on the idea of the inferiority or superiority of a sexual orientation or gender identity, or of a gender expression.

This respect for diversity begins within schools themselves. The teachers and pupils must be able to work in an environment respectful of diversity, free from violence,

harassment and the various forms of social exclusion or discriminatory treatment. To promote tolerance and mutual respect in schools, it is essential that children and teachers should be given objective information concerning the diversity existing in every society and that all pupils should be able to live in conformity with their cultural or religious roots as well as their sexual orientation and their real or perceived gender identity, or that of their parents.

Mr. Moderator,

In conclusion, I should like to stress that, if we wish to promote tolerance and mutual respect, the key role of education in this regard must be recognized. The organization of our school systems must reflect the diversity of our societies. If our schools are open to all teachers and pupils without distinction, and they are free to express their personalities there, we will have taken a great step towards inclusive, tolerant societies, respectful of diversity.