



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Kazakhstan's Offer to Host a Tolerance Conference in 2006

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
May 5, 2005

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States has taken note of the letter circulated by the Permanent Mission of Kazakhstan yesterday, proposing to hold a conference in 2006 to follow up on the work that we hope to accomplish in Cordoba this June. We welcome Kazakhstan's interest in tolerance issues as reflected in this invitation and we encourage Kazakhstan -- and all OSCE participating States -- to continue efforts to implement the commitments that we have made to combat all forms of intolerance.

We submit that it would be most logical to decide how to follow up the Cordoba Conference after that conference has been held, when we will all have a much better and clearer understanding of its outcome and what further work is needed.

Since the inception of the tolerance agenda within the OSCE, many participating States have been of two minds. On one side, the conferences have helped focus our attention on this important issue which affects all our countries, and have helped OSCE become a beacon for tolerance, penetrating the darkness of prejudice and misunderstanding and intolerance. At the same time, we should be cautious that institutionalizing our tolerance work through annual conferences at the "highest political level" does not emphasize form over substance.

Following the Vienna Conference on anti-Semitism and the Vienna Conference on racism, xenophobia and discrimination, both in 2003; the Berlin Conference on anti-Semitism in April 2004; the Paris Meeting on the relationship between Internet hate speech and crime in June 2004; the Brussels Conference on racism, xenophobia and discrimination in September 2004; and now the Cordoba Conference in June, which will be our sixth, the time has come to look at what we have undertaken to do, and what we have done, and what remains to be done to bring to fruition the results of all these conferences.

The next OSCE tolerance event should truly focus on implementation, and that should be at the expert level.

If Kazakhstan or any other State is committed to holding a conference, we will consider the proposal based on its merits and in light of the outcomes of Cordoba. However, we believe that all interested participating States should have an opportunity to consider carefully any proposal for such a meeting before irrevocable, high-level invitations are issued. We would be ill-served if we reached a point where a declaration of willingness to host a conference automatically resulted in a full scale meeting or required others to perhaps have to oppose

such a conference, even though they strongly support the underlying objective of promoting tolerance, just because the vehicle – such as a high-level conference – may just not be the right thing at that time.

We have all made some tough commitments to combat intolerance in the OSCE region, and I hope that we will all continue to strive hard to make concrete progress in implementing those commitments. Those states seeking indeed to promote OSCE-wide progress in the fight against intolerance are most welcome and should consider making concrete contributions – of funds, personnel, information on best practices, or cooperation with individual ODIHR projects – to the ODIHR Program on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination.

But further conferences will not necessarily institutionalize the ODIHR Program or produce results that we seek. Implementing our tolerance commitments -- and ensuring that ODIHR has the resources it needs to do its job properly -- should be our first priority.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.