

Osservatorio per la Tolleranza e la Libertà Religiosa <i>“Giuseppe Dossetti”</i> Observatory for Religious Tolerance and Freedom
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## **2015 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting – Working Session 12**

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In the OSCE area many persons and groups are subject to threats or acts of discrimination, hostility or violence as a result of their racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic or religious identity. There are also other forms of intolerance – for example on grounds of property or social origin –, which are exacerbated by the on-going global economic crisis. Moreover, there are people who suffer violations of their rights because their disability. All these phenomena undoubtedly threaten the social cohesion inside each participating State, seriously affecting the group that is the victim. Some of them may also erode the confidence between States and trigger violence and conflict on a wider-scale.

In this respect let me draw your attention on the fact that – according to the data presented this morning – crimes committed due to religious hatred are not only directed against people, but increasingly target places of worship, cemeteries and other religious properties, whereas the right to maintain such places is explicitly guaranteed in international human rights instruments as part of the freedom of religion or belief. Moreover social hostility against religious communities is pervasive in many participating States and is often centred on religious premises.

The effects of this phenomenon cannot easily be overestimated: they may foster a climate of fear and intimidation, thus threatening existing religious pluralism and undermining peace and stability of the whole OSCE area. Therefore in accordance with its feature as a security organization, the OSCE and its participating States should develop a specific response to it.

In combating hate crimes, primary responsibility rests with the participating States. It is not satisfactory that they do not commit violence themselves, but they have a positive duty to protect the individuals within their jurisdiction and punish the perpetrators. To this end training on hate crimes for law enforcement agencies (such TAHCLE program), for prosecutors (like PAHCT program) and for civil society plays an essential role. Moreover participating States are required to do their best efforts in order to prevent the hate crimes from being committed through educative programmes, awareness campaign and so on.

Finally, let me mention the importance of data-collection in order to understand and address hate crimes. The new website launched by the ODIHR is an important tool, but under-reporting and under-recording undermine its effectiveness. Therefore participating States have to improve their efforts on data collection through measures such as increased involvement of civil society, enhanced disaggregated data and development of national action plan.