



2011 Hours Against Hate Campaign Freedom of Thought, Conscience, Religion or Belief

Address by Farah Pandith, U. S. Special Representative to Muslim Communities and Hannah Rosenthal, U. S. Special Envoy to Monitor and Combat Anti-Semitism to the Permanent Council, Vienna, Austria
February 17, 2011

NOTE: Please check against delivery

Mr. Chairman,

Thank you for your invitation to speak to you today. It is an honor to be able to talk to our respected colleagues at the OSCE, an organization that continues to push ahead on issues that are facing our societies at many levels. OSCE commitments to freedom of thought, conscience, religion, and belief are laudable. The obligation of participating States to respect these fundamental human rights is at the core of this organization; cemented in the Ten Principles set forth in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act. The commitments of the member States ensure the freedom of the individual “to profess and practice” religion and related rights, which extend beyond worship alone. However, we are here today because despite dedication to these freedoms by the OSCE and other governmental and international organizations, more needs to be done.

Latest trends show growing movements that target ‘the other’ – be they immigrants, or religious and ethnic minorities, in the name of protecting the identity and ‘purity’ of their nation. In 2010, Swastikas were spray-painted on Jewish tombs, schools, synagogues, and kosher shops in several European countries. And the permissibility of anti-Muslim speech is growing. When this fear and hatred of the ‘other’ occurs, it alienates citizens and is undercuts societies.

We would like to underscore that fundamental freedoms and human rights – particularly freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and freedom of expression – are essential elements to combat all forms of intolerance, and that, unfortunately, these fundamental freedoms are not yet fully respected in the OSCE region. Protecting individual rights and ensuring space for civil society must remain a singular priority for all participating States.

President Obama has talked repeatedly about the importance of opening new dialogue and protecting religious freedom. In his inaugural address, he pointed to a planet where “old hatreds shall someday pass; lines of tribe shall soon dissolve; [and] as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself.” The moment is now. At a time when the entire world is connected – that a voice in Nigeria can impact a perspective in the

Netherlands – we must and can do more to built societies that are more respectful. In Cairo in June 2009, President Obama called for new relationships built on “mutual interest and mutual respect.” It is time for all of us—government and civic leaders, business and non-governmental leaders, and young leaders of the next generation—to not only be respectful and decrease incidences of violence and hate, but to work together on projects for the common good. We live in a world where the challenges of tomorrow transcend borders; whether facing up to the problems of climate change or health, terrorism or education, no one group can do it alone.

Last year Special Envoy Rosenthal and I traveled to Astana, Kazakhstan to give remarks at the OSCE High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. This was an important opportunity to discuss bridging gaps between disparate communities and talk openly about issues of discrimination that continue to plague countries in the OSCE community and beyond.

Actions speak louder than words, and so we decided to switch speeches. The State Department’s Special Envoy to Combat Anti-Semitism spoke out against anti-Muslim-hatred and the Special Representative to Muslim Communities spoke out against Anti-Semitism. We both ended our remarks with this simple line, “Jews cannot fight anti-Semitism alone. Muslims cannot fight “Islamophobia” alone... Hate is hate, but we can overcome it together.”

Steps must be taken to guard against indifference to injustice, no matter who is the victim. We must strive to ensure that Muslims, Jews, Christians, or members of other religious groups in the OSCE region are not marginalized, stereotyped or discriminated against. Discriminatory religion laws with onerous registration requirements repress peaceful religious belief. This is particularly true when a legal structure with multi-tiered layers of qualification metes out privileges and rights for majority faiths in a country, with the effect being to eclipse and restrict minority religious groups.

We strongly support ODIHR’s efforts in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination. We particularly applaud programs to combat racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, Christians and members of other religions and other forms of intolerance and discrimination.

We encourage continued cooperation with the Chairmanship’s three Personal Representatives on Tolerance and Special Representative for Gender Issues, as well as the Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief in this regard. We also commend ODIHR’s important efforts to deal with hate crimes.

With increasing reports of hate crimes and other forms of intolerance in OSCE participating States, we must all commit to doing more. We urge OSCE participating States to implement Ministerial Decision 9/09 on Combating Hate Crimes adopted at the Athens Ministerial. In particular, States must honor commitments to collect hate crime data, report that data to ODIHR, and adopt and implement hate crimes legislation.

We have come back to the OSCE not just to speak against discrimination, but to take action—to build upon a moment and provoke tangible change. This year we are launching a campaign called *2011 Hours Against Hate*. With increased rhetoric against minority groups--whether religious, race, socio-economic, or gender based—we must do more to stop the

acceptability of hatred of the other. It is not only destructive to the present but it impacts the future.

Thus, this campaign is action oriented and forward thinking. Over the next year we will ask young people around the world to do their part to be respectful of the other. To give dignity to the idea that someone who is different from you should be treated respectfully. The campaign will call upon the next generation to volunteer their time for the other—a Jew for a Muslim charity, a man for a women’s shelter, a Muslim for a Jewish clinic, a Christian for a Bahai food pantry. We are doing this because we realize that today’s youth will not be able to tackle the challenges of the future if they are entrenched in the divisions of the past. This is a small step in the right direction, but it is a virtual campaign of deeds.

From Spain to Azerbaijan we will visit historical examples of different groups living together peacefully and prosperously. We know that there has never been a “Golden Age” with regard to mutual respect, but there have been times when communities have lived and worked together as people. For example, in 15th Century Turkey, Sultan Mehmed fostered multi-religious communities throughout Istanbul, where Jews and Muslims coexisted side-by-side. The Tunisian island of Djerba is home to one of the world’s oldest Jewish communities. In Safi, Morocco, Jews and Muslims have prayed alongside each other for the past nine-centuries. And during the Holocaust, King Zog of Albania issued four hundred passports to refugee Jews, granting them safe entry into his country and saving their lives. We clearly understand that the experiences of each religious group are not the same. We clearly understand that individual groups are navigating through difficult waters right now. Issues surrounding anti-Muslim speech or anti-Semitic language are not comparable – but – at the essence is the need to do more to be respectful of the other, including the way we talk to and about each other.

The 2011 Hours Against Hate Campaign will take us to many of your countries and in conjunction with highlighting symbols of the past, young people will create new histories of “mutual respect”. Your young citizens will be asked to take part in a global campaign to “stop hate.”

Together we must stand up for respect and speak out against bigotry. We hope that you and your governments will consider joining our campaign.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.