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OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism and on other forms of intolerance

Session 2: Education on the Holocaust and on anti-Semitism

Statement by Mr. Piet de Klerk, Human Rights Ambassador, the Netherlands

The year 2005 marks the sixtieth anniversary of the end of WW II and the beginning of European co-operation to prevent the horrors of war and to combat the scourge of anti-Semitism. Today, unfortunately, we have not succeeded in eliminating anti-Semitism. To the contrary, anti-Semitism has increased in Europe in recent years.

In reaction to this trend, the international community has increased co-operation to contribute to the fight against discrimination. The OSCE participating States have stepped up efforts in the field of intolerance since the Maastricht Ministerial Council and the conferences against anti-Semitism in Vienna and Berlin. Although it is too early to say, we might see some impact of these enhanced cooperative efforts.

One of the most important aspects of the fight against anti-Semitism is Education. Teaching history will prevent people from making the same mistakes twice. This is especially important in the case of the atrocities that happened during WWII. An important role in this field lies with schools. Schools do not only have the responsibility to teach knowledge to children, but they also play an important part in stimulating critical thinking. And schools have to look after the social development of the children in their care. This responsibility is twofold:

- First, schools need to remain a safe haven for teachers and students alike. Therefore all schools in The Netherlands have adopted a safety policy. Part of this policy is to demonstrate a positive societal model to students.
- Secondly, schools have a responsibility to encourage social behaviour by teaching students social skills and to familiarise them with relevant norms and values, the reasons behind them and their function in a multicultural society.

The Dutch government as such is not responsible for the teaching materials used in schools. However it is responsible for the attainment of goals and end qualifications that describe the required content of the educational programs. Several of these goals are related to combating racism and anti-Semitism. Some of them have just been changed to be more effective in combating discrimination. Holocaust education plays a significant role in attaining one of these goals.

Teacher training has to meet statutory requirements. Teachers need to be aware of their role in the formation of the student's identity and the development of children's values. The School Inspection is paying more attention to anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination, for example within the framework of social safety in schools.

Dutch civil society is also very active in combating discrimination through education:

- The Anne Frank Foundation implements a project that focuses on how students interact in education. This project helps schools to discuss the problems of racism and prejudice.
- The National Bureau for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination¹ implements a project in secondary education aimed at the prevention and elimination of prejudices, discrimination and racism. This project also pays attention to anti-Semitism. The Bureau has also developed teaching materials for teachers in all levels of education.
- The Centre for Information and Documentation on Israel (CIDI) also provides teaching materials. Its programme is directed at educating students about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. CIDI also organises activities like sport competitions between Moroccan and Jewish youth and a common excursion to the Westerbork concentration camp.

Several civil society organisations in the Netherlands complement educational efforts through the publication of reports and the organisation of seminars on anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination.

To conclude, Mr. Chairman, let me emphasise that this session finds its importance in the valuable lessons history can teach us. It is only in understanding history that we can avoid the same mistakes that have been made in the past. Education plays a crucial role in this respect. Through education we can gain knowledge which in turn might lead to more understanding. Knowledge and understanding are the best tools in our fight against intolerance.

¹ Landelijk Bureau ter Bestrijding van Rassendiscriminatie (LBR)