



**OSCE Conference on combating discrimination and promoting
mutual respect and understanding**

Bucharest, 7 and 8 June 2007

**Speech of the Head of the Swiss delegation,
Ambassador Dr. Rudolf Schaller**

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

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Mr. Chairman

Since the conference in Cordoba two years ago, the societies and governments of our member states have had to deal with important issues relating to tolerance and discrimination. We have gone about this in part in the form of public debate, occasionally with the close attention of the mass media. As a result we have come to the conclusion that the path taken at Cordoba is the right one, but the future is sure to be littered with obstacles. Anti-Semitism, as well as intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, Christians and members of other religious groups are not only alarming, they present a danger which directly affects the essence and the development of our community of values. Much is thus at stake. In this light, we would like to express our thanks to the Spanish Chairman-in-Office and our Romanian hosts for the opportunity to send once again a clear international signal against anti-Semitism, hostility towards Muslims, and discrimination against members of other religious communities including Christians.

Mr. Chairman,

Unfortunately, Switzerland too is not immune from incidents motivated by hate and contempt for people of other beliefs. Nevertheless, our forefathers learned from their experience how to get along with people from different religious communities. Without being bound by a noble ideal of love for our fellow citizens, our ancestors were required to treat members of other religious communities correctly. The Age of the Enlightenment also taught us this: it gave us a standard of values by which a constitutional state with an international outlook - like Switzerland - can measure itself. Today, we must all, in Switzerland as well as throughout the OSCE area, decisively reject all forms of discrimination whether they are directed specifically against Jewish, Muslim or Christian communities.

As concerns Switzerland, I would first like briefly to recall that the task of running our country is divided between state, administration and civil society, and that it relies on existing offices and institutions. This system has proven itself. It is well known that article 261bis of the Penal Code has been in force since 1 January 1995. This anti-racism article is a state measure, and enforcement is incumbent on the justice system. The law forbids public discrimination and attacks on the human dignity of individuals or groups on the grounds of race, origin, or affiliation to an ethnic or religious group. This article also makes it a criminal offence to deny genocide and to publish revisionist or anti-Semitic documents or to take part in revisionist or anti-Semitic activities.

The independent watchdog, the Federal Committee against Racism, documents compliance with international conventions and monitors criminal cases involving acts of racism. The anonymous summaries of these court decisions can be downloaded from the Internet site of the Federal Committee against Racism.

In addition to the cantonal offices, the Service for Combating Racism is also worthy of mention. This is an administrative office that coordinates the activities of the Confederation, the cantons, the municipalities and civil society and can finance the projects of third parties. Moreover, the Confederation works closely with associations and organisations in the framework of the *"Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research (ITF)"*. As a concrete result of these efforts it can be mentioned that, since 2004, Swiss schools have remembered

the liberation of Auschwitz on 27 January, and that students receive instruction about the inconceivable horrors of the Holocaust.

In Switzerland, inter-religious dialogue has made gratifying progress. The three representatives of the most important religious communities in Switzerland are present at this meeting, and will report to you on the first steps of the Council of Religions. The majority of Muslims living in Switzerland are foreign citizens and were not born in Switzerland. It is therefore of considerable importance to them that they feel socially integrated, especially because their religious communities are privately organized. The creation of this Council can be seen as a useful tool against intolerance, hate campaigns and discrimination.

Mr. Chairman

The incidents of the past years have not only made demands on individual member states but much more on the OSCE as a whole. Here in Bucharest, we shall be able to exchange views and experiences and discuss approaches to solutions in formal as well as informal settings. Our respect goes to the work of the Chairman's three special representatives against intolerance, hate and discrimination. However, I would like to suggest that serious thought be given to the question of how their different activities can be integrated in an overall concept. This would prevent possible dissipation of resources and benefit the reputation of our organization.

Mr. Chairman

Finally I would like to thank once again the Spanish Chairman-in-Office and our Romanian hosts for all that they have done to make this conference a success.

Thank you for your attention