



OSCE, Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, Warsaw, 30 September 2014

Working session 12: Agenda item Tolerance II

## Recommendations from Coalition for Trust in South Caucasus

We call on the government of Azerbaijan to immediately release all political prisoners and to allow civil society to operate freely in the pursuit of tolerance and increasing respect to human rights within the country and in the South Caucasus, and all other social issues deemed by civil society groups to be of importance.

We further call on the all governments and authorities in the region of the South Caucasus to co-operate and support the Coalition for Trust, in recognition of the benefits increased trust can bring to all people of the region.

Finally, we call on participating states to support and promote trust building run by civil society actors, especially at a time when they are more in demand than in long while.

## Statement

The Norwegian Helsinki Committee is working with partner Civil Society organizations in the South Caucasus to promote trust and tolerance in the region. We and our partners share the understanding that a **human rights approach to building of trust**, is the approach that will best make a contribution to a future process of building of trust, to the management of existing conflicts and their negative influence in society and to prevent new conflicts, especially so at a time when state level attempts at peacebuilding is stalled at best.

The project is called "Coalition for Trust in the South Caucasus", because this is exactly what we aim to create: A broad regional coalition that will bring together civil society members in a broad sense, independent media, government officials and communities, students and individuals who will work actively to promote positive development, building of trust and cooperation in the South Caucasus.

The project draws upon best experiences from successful trust building projects in other conflict areas and is supported by the European Union and Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Implementation of this human rights approach to building of trust, together with changes in attitudes and enhanced public participation, will contribute to the development of democracy, the promotion of human rights, intercultural understanding and reconciliation in the region.

Clearly, changes will not come easy. Societies in the region have lived in near isolation from each other over the past 25 years, in a period of rapid social change. There is little history of interaction

between people and CSOs across borders. And to make matters worse, hostile action is still ongoing. Building peace and trust from grass root level will be a long-term, uphill task.

Since the project started one and a half year ago we have focused on building a foundation of knowledge, skills and competences about human rights and their protection, intercultural understanding and coexistence in a multicultural society, political and civil participation, discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice, group formation, 'the us and them' phenomenon, dialogue, peaceful conflict resolution, the concept of transitional justice and its mechanisms, arenas which contribute to building relations on political, social and individual levels, legal resolution of previous violations of human rights, the use and misuse of history and how to establish a common perception of values that will be the base for unity and coexistence in the future, and for the bearers of reconciliation in the end.

Building knowledge, skills and motivation and opening new channels of communication is however not enough for our efforts to be effective.

Of late we have become very concerned about the increasing restrictions on independent civil society in Azerbaijan, including arrests, denial of official registration and financial hindrances. For civil society to make a positive contribution to tolerance in the region, or indeed on any issue of importance, governments must respect the right of civil society to organise and operate according to its own goals and agendas in accordance with freedom of speech, assembly, association and other international human rights.