



United States Mission to the OSCE

Plenary Session 5: The role of human rights youth education in promoting mutual understanding and respect for diversity in accordance with the existing OSCE commitments

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Since its inception, the OSCE has recognized the essential value of human rights education and the need to focus such efforts, in particular, on youth. Today, the majority of the world's population is under the age of 30. To ensure that the youth of today have the tools they need to contribute to vibrant, just and successful societies, we must ensure that, from an early age, human rights education is an integral component of their broader educational experience. This is vital for all our societies. It promotes equality, empowerment and participation, as well as conflict prevention and resolution, and facilitates the development of societies where the human rights of all are respected and protected.

There is a rich framework of OSCE commitments related to human rights education, dating back to the Helsinki Final Act (1975) and confirmed in the Copenhagen and Moscow Documents and the Istanbul Charter for European Security. Among the more recent key documents is the 2005 Ministerial Council Decision on Promotion of Human Rights Education and Training in the OSCE Area. At Maastricht (2003), all participating States also committed to address threats related to discrimination and intolerance, and in particular highlighted the need to focus on youth "in order to build up their understanding of the need for tolerance and the importance of reconciliation and peaceful coexistence."

In 2009, ODIHR, together with the Council of Europe and the UN, compiled a compendium of best practices in human rights education that is a testament to the ingenuity and dedication of educators, government officials, civil society and faith groups across the OSCE space – particularly in regions that have experienced inter-ethnic or communal tension or conflict, e.g., the Balkans or Northern Ireland, to ensure that children are taught respect and acceptance, not hatred and intolerance. In 2012, ODIHR published guidelines on Human Rights Education for secondary schools. These are but a few facets of ODIHR's ongoing work to promote effective strategies for teaching human rights, respect for diversity and tolerance among youth, and are valuable resources on which all pS should draw. OSCE Field Missions are carrying out a range of programs that put into practice these guidelines and strategies.

These efforts are more important than ever. Prejudice and intolerance toward members of minorities and migrants appear to be growing, including in the United States. Instances of

hate crimes—which ODIHR is helping participating States identify, track, and respond to—often result from a lack of education and exposure to people who are different from oneself. Instituting school programs that teach students how to relate to others from different backgrounds and cultures helps students learn early in life how to appreciate diversity and relate peaceably to other people.

Children are aware of racial and gender differences at a very young age. Recent studies show that by age twelve they have formed stereotypes, and that tolerance education is most effective between the ages of four and nine years. Therefore, it is important to teach tolerance to young children and continue reinforcing the message over time.

In the United States, schools, civil society organizations, and faith-based groups have created a vibrant web of programs and activities to promote tolerance and to combat phenomena such as bullying. These programs help make children aware of their own human rights and enable them to practice skills and attitudes that empower them to enjoy and exercise those rights, and to learn to value the human dignity of others. The government -- at the national, state, and local levels-- supports these initiatives and plays a critical role in tackling manifestations of intolerance and discrimination in our schools to ensure that schools are places where the dignity of every child is upheld.

For instance, anti-bullying initiatives are underpinned by civil rights laws that offer protections from harassment and discrimination. In 2010, the Department of Education widely disseminated guidance to schools, colleges and universities in the United States clarifying from the relationship between harassment and bullying under civil rights laws. The letter explained school's legal obligations for addressing student-on-student bullying based on students' race, color, national origin, sex, or disability. In addition, the Federal Government helps states and districts design and implement effective policies for schools to prevent bullying, protect victims, and hold those who bully accountable. Strong anti-bullying laws and policies send a message that harassing behaviors will not be tolerated.

Beyond our borders, outreach to youth has become an integral element of U.S. foreign policy. Many of our programs seek to build ties and break down barriers among young people who might not ordinarily interact with one another. The Department of State's Youth Leadership Programs provide participants from over 100 countries worldwide the opportunity to explore respect for diversity, civic rights and responsibilities, youth leadership development, and community activism through month-long, group exchanges. The State Department also sponsors Roma education programs in Macedonia, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Moldova to foster multi-ethnic civic engagement combining education and skills development to produce community-based action on issues of interest to both Roma and non-Roma youth.

We look forward to learning more about the ways in which other participating States are addressing the critically important task of educating our children for the future and look forward to a fruitful dialogue on how we might better implement our OSCE commitments in this realm.

EXAMPLES OF USG YOUTH TOLERANCE EDUCATION INITIATIVES

Youth Tolerance Education Abroad

- The Department of State's Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review (QDDR, a four year study that analyzes U.S. diplomatic and development efforts abroad) mandates that "the United States must reach out to youth populations to promote growth and stable democratic government." The U.S. has developed effective approaches to interacting with youth, from exchange programs and democracy training, to development, health, civic education, and economic empowerment programs.
- In 2011 Secretary Clinton established the Office of Global Youth Issues led by Zeenat Rahman as Special Adviser to the Secretary. She is responsible for coordinating youth policy and programming. Secretary Kerry is continuing our Youth Policy with Ms. Rahman.
- American embassies and consulates are starting Youth Councils that invite young people to share their ideas with us. The Youth Councils convene a cross-section of youth advisers from around the host country on a regular basis to a) provide input and help inform the United States' role in their country and b) cooperate in the development of programs to address local issues. In over 60 countries, Youth Councils are designing and implementing small-grants initiatives to address local challenges and improve local communities. In the OSCE, the U.S. supports Youth Councils at our Embassies and Consulates in Bratislava, Brussels, Almaty, Copenhagen, Dublin, Kyiv, Madrid and Barcelona, Riga, Skopje, and Stockholm.
- A Department program engages young people across Georgia to increase public awareness of diversity; and support mechanisms for interaction between the government and ethnic minorities, including the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.
- A DRL-sponsored initiative is training ethnic Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Tajik religious leaders in Kyrgyzstan on inter-ethnic tolerance and reconciliation, and a youth theater effort in Kyrgyzstan aims to mitigate potential conflict by developing plays based on real situations in communities that address, among other issues, living peacefully in a multi-ethnic environment.
- Girls and young women are often the most vulnerable victims of disenfranchisement and oppression. In February 2012, the U.S. Department of State announced the global Empowering Women and Girls through Sports Initiative. This mobilizes all of the U.S. Department of State's international sports programming, from Sports Envoys traveling overseas to international Sports Visitors traveling to the United States, to increase the number of women and girls worldwide who are involved in sports.
- UNESCO, with leadership from the U.S. and Brazil, launched a multilateral effort in 2012 to combat racism and intolerance, "Teaching Respect for All." The program will develop policy guidelines and materials that will be made available to interested educators

and policymakers wishing to integrate the anti-discrimination theme into existing curricula. The materials will be piloted in ten countries.

- The “It Gets Better Project” uses technology, social media, community engagement, and storytelling to reach LGBT youth in crisis — wherever they live and whatever their circumstances — to offer a message of hope. It urges young people to stay true to themselves through the bullying and other challenges that confront them in their adolescent years, and describes the positive future they could experience as adults. A remarkable number of people from outside the United States who have been inspired by the message have reached out to the Project and expressed the desire to use the message to promote change in their home countries.

Youth Tolerance Education in the United States

- U.S. case law has served as a model for other countries in setting the stage for legislation that encourages equal education. Inspired by the landmark 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision that declared segregated schooling unconstitutional, Vanda Durbakova, a Slovak civil rights lawyer, filed a suit in 2010 against the Sarisske Michalany elementary school. Recently, she won a legal victory. An appeals tribunal in the city of Presov ruled that the school had violated an antidiscrimination law by separating students. The three-judge panel rejected arguments that segregated teaching was driven by legitimate academic considerations, and ordered that classes be integrated by the start of the next school year.
- For far too many students, getting ready for school means more than studying for an exam or writing a research paper – it means girding for a day marred by bullying and physical and verbal harassment. Harassment for any reason, much less belonging to a specific vulnerable group, is not a rite of passage, and it can have devastating consequences far beyond the classroom.
- While the United States is a federal system, and as such, has no national education curriculum, the U.S. Government supports the work of non-governmental organizations and of our individual states and local districts to promote respect for human rights in schools throughout our country.
- Under U.S. law, schools have certain obligations to take effective steps to prevent and redress harassment of their students. We aggressively enforce laws requiring schools to stop harassment and to develop proactive policies and practices to enhance student safety.

Department of Justice (DOJ)

- The Civil Rights Division of the Department of Justice (DOJ) has an active education docket that includes longstanding efforts to desegregate schools and ensure the meaningful participation of English Language Learner students – those who are not yet fluent in English. We also have an expanding docket of cases addressing school harassment and discrimination against immigrant students.
- Over the last four years, the Division has achieved great success on behalf of all students. We have secured relief in 43 desegregation cases by integrating faculties, expanding access to advanced courses, eliminating race-based extra-curricular activities, halting segregative

student transfers, and closing single-race schools. We have also secured a record 16 settlement agreements providing for meaningful access to education for English Language Learners and 10 agreements addressing the harassment of students on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion or disability — including verbal and physical harassment of students for their failure to conform to gender stereotypes, which often affects LGBT students.

- In addition to legal enforcement, the Department of Education (ED) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) work closely on a number of critical education issues. In 2011, the DOJ's Division of Civil Rights and the ED issued joint guidance to remind public schools in all of our 50 states of their obligation to welcome and enroll students regardless of their or their parents' immigration status. In same year, ED and DOJ again issued joint guidance on promoting diversity and avoiding the harms of racial isolation in elementary and secondary schools, and in institutions of higher education.

Department of Education (ED)

- ED's work furthers the principles of human and civil rights, civic responsibility, and character development, including knowledge about diverse cultures and religious traditions, tolerance, civility, and mutual respect. Recently, ED began a civic learning and engagement initiative to encourage and strengthen high-quality civic education, including civic principles and civic, global, and intercultural literacy (<http://www.ed.gov/civic-learning>). ED's 2012 report on enhancing civic learning explains that "[d]one well, civic education teaches students to communicate effectively, to work collaboratively, to ask tough questions, and to appreciate diversity."
- In the last four fiscal years, Education's Office for Civil Rights (ED/OCR) launched 61 investigations that, collectively, address a broad range of Title VI-related issues in institutions across the nation, including allegations such as the denial of access to college-and career-preparatory courses and programs and other educational opportunities, discriminatory discipline, and barriers to education for English learners.
- In addition, because educators, as well as parents and students, must have the knowledge and skills to identify discrimination, to prevent it, and to address it or get help when it does occur, every year, OCR provides technical assistance to schools and communities around the country on both longstanding and emerging civil rights issues. In FY 2012, OCR engaged in 106 technical assistance events on Title VI-related issues.
- The United States also assists school districts in voluntarily ending de facto segregation and avoiding racial isolation and in promoting diversity by 1) providing technical assistance in achieving these compelling government interests in ways that comply with non-discrimination laws, and 2) providing financial incentives to school districts for programs like magnet schools – schools with specialized courses or curricula that attract students from different areas with differing educational, economic, racial and ethnic backgrounds. As noted, ED/OCR conducts technical assistance and outreach activities each year, and it offers assistance on its website in 20 languages.

- ED also administers higher education programs that provide financial aid to students in need; promotes educational equality for students who are members of minority groups; assists school districts in offering educational opportunities to Native Hawaiians, American Indians, and Alaska Natives; and provides grants to strengthen higher education institutions that serve populations historically underserved (e.g., minority serving institutions and historically Black colleges and universities).
- A representative of the Department of Education is an ex-officio member on the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council.

Combating Bullying

- The U.S. Government is committed to provide guidelines for local officials to follow and enforce federal civil rights laws, and to help states and districts design and implement effective policies for schools to prevent bullying, protect victims, and hold those who bully accountable. Strong anti-bullying laws and policies send a message that harassing behaviors will not be tolerated.
- The state of Florida, for example, provides a detailed and specific definition of conduct that is considered bullying. Massachusetts' state policy includes a provision to provide training to teachers and other school employees to prevent, identify, and respond to bullying.
- By highlighting these best practices, we help state and local policymakers and educators work to keep children safe and provide the best learning environment for all students.
- In addition in 2011 the Department of Education (ED) established a new technical assistance center that focuses on encouraging safe and supportive learning environments. This center addresses bullying issues as part of its work.
- In 2012, a Congressional Anti-Bullying Caucus was launched to address the nationwide finding that "every year, millions of Americans are physically or psychologically attacked on the basis of their skin color, ethnicity, physical or mental abilities, sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, religion, or age." A central goal of the caucus is to expand federal protections against bullying.
- In the United States, findings from the 2011-2012 Global Sikh Civil and Human Rights Report, included that bullying continues to be an issue for Sikh children. For instance Sikh boys have been targeted by other students who have cut or set their hair on fire. The Sikh community in California is currently supporting state legislation that would create a Bullying Prevention Center that would house trained professionals to assist students and parents with conflict resolution, crisis intervention, suicide prevention and bullying prevention resources.
- President Obama has made clear his commitment to protecting children from bullying and harassment of all kinds; he and First Lady Michelle Obama convened a conference at the White House in March 2011 to bring students, parents, educators and other stakeholders together to discuss bullying prevention.

- ED's Office of Safe and Healthy Students (OSHS) has forged links between school police chiefs and juvenile and family court judges and is circulating information on best practices to prevent, mitigate, and deal with crime and violence in schools, and ED and DOJ hosted a first-ever conference on this issue in 2010.
- OSHS leads the Federal Partners in Bullying Prevention, a coalition of nine federal departments working together to develop and distribute research-based information on bullying prevention including: hosting three bullying prevention summits for non-profit and corporate leaders with bullying prevention efforts; conducting a series of webinars; releasing guidance and technical assistance letters on laws and policies; and developing StopBullying.gov, an interagency collaboration led by OSHS to collect federal resources on bullying prevention in a central and easy-to access website with specific information on how to identify, prevent, respond to bullying. The StopBullying.gov website additionally has a dedicated site for kids and also an interactive map detailing the components of all current state anti-bullying laws and model policies.