

**Address by the Minister of Justice of Lithuania Mr. Remigijus Šimašius at Astana  
High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination**

*At the Opening session 10.00-11.30, 29 June, Astana*

Mr. Chairman,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
distinguished participants of the conference,

First of all, I would like to thank the Kazakh Chairmanship for organizing this High level event. Lithuania, as a **member of OSCE Troika** this year and as an incoming Chair of OSCE in 2011 is honored to address the distinguished audience on this important topic, to which we are going to attach our special attention also next year.

Though OSCE over the years has accumulated a number of important commitments in the area of Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, and is actively involved in programmatic work through ODIHR and Field Operations in assisting the participating States, the level of **implementation** of common commitments differs throughout the OSCE region.

Nowadays, facing a growing number of xenophobic political discourse, violent hate motivated incidents, manifestations of intolerance based on different reasons, be it religion, ethnicity, race, gender or orientation, we need to approach all forms of discrimination and intolerance in a **comprehensive way**.

Indeed, the primary **responsibility for addressing acts of intolerance** and discrimination lies with the participating States. A lot depends on their respective legislation and law enforcement capabilities, but also a great deal on their **political will**.

We should not forget that public manifestations of intolerance need to be addressed in **accordance with OSCE freedom of expression commitments** and in **due respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms**.

As the minister of Justice, I can confidently say, that the **role of legislation and law enforcement** in combating intolerance and discrimination is essential, but equally important is the role of **NGOs and civil society** in prevention of intolerance and promotion of respect for diversity. The role of national institutions **in data collecting** and monitoring of hate crimes is also key.

Moreover, **free media and constructive public discourse** play a key role in promoting mutual understanding and respect, diversity and freedom of opinion. In prevention of intolerance and discrimination **an important tool is education**. I am glad that my delegation consists of experts from Lithuania, who are going to speak in the sessions of this conference on **combating anti-Semitism**, on **the role of education** and on **addressing manifestations of intolerance in the media**, they will share with the distinguished participants of this event the experience of my country in tackling the topical issues of this High level conference.

Using this opportunity, let me emphasize **the important role of ODIHR** that it is playing in assisting participating States to promotion tolerance and inclusion through **educational programs** and distribution of **best practices**. My country is one among many which benefited a lot from educational programs aimed at combating anti-Semitism.

In the past, unfortunately, my country faced and witnessed this form of intolerance. Today, our government and society makes every effort to **restore confidence and mutual respect**, to safeguard the valuable **cultural heritage of the Jewish community** in the pre-II World War Lithuania.

There are important aspects **of property restitution** that our parliament and government are still working on, which are necessary to be completed soon in order to **re-build the trust and historical justice**.

Ladies and gentlemen,

On the final note, let me wish that this conference has fruitful discussions, exchange of views between governments and the civil society.

As a result, the areas should be identified, where further work needs to be done, where there is systematic **lack of implementation**, where **any new forms of intolerance** are to be tackled, so that OSCE participating States can take necessary steps and redouble their efforts in **protecting human security and dignity of all persons of our countries**, and that they **receive equal and effective protection of law**.

Thank you.