



## Deutschland 2016

Civil Society Pre-Conference for the  
“OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Tolerance and Diversity”

**Speech by the Special Representative for the  
German OSCE Chairmanship 2016  
Dr. h.c. Gernot Erler**

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Representatives of civil society,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

You are all very welcome at this gathering here at the Federal Foreign Office on the day before our OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Tolerance and Diversity.

These meetings and the OSCE’s work on the topics of tolerance and diversity are not a new departure, but rather a long and established tradition.

Over ten years ago, in Córdoba in 2005, as some of you will recall, the OSCE organised the first such meeting on combating various forms of intolerance. We have continued this

series of events over the past years. One such event was the second major Conference on Anti-Semitism, which took place here in Berlin in November 2014.

Close cooperation with civil society has been part of the “DNA” of the CSCE and later of the OSCE since the Helsinki Final Act. However, it is more prevalent and established in the fields of tolerance and non-discrimination than in almost any other area. But at the same time, it is particularly necessary in these fields.

Governments’ intolerance towards their citizens and intolerance between individuals and entire groups in our societies pose a threat to our common security and stability.

This is why the Helsinki Final Act laid the foundations for the OSCE’s work in these areas.

In the Final Act’s key seventh principle, the participating States undertake – and I quote – “to respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedom of thought, conscience, religion or belief, for all without distinction as to race, sex, language or religion”.

In the wake of sweeping change in Europe after 1989, this undertaking became extremely important. The wars in former Yugoslavia, other internal conflicts, waves of refugees

and the resurgence of nationalist movements brought home to us the dangers of intolerance, mutual alienation and unchecked hatred.

It was only possible to gradually bridge the rifts created in this period by conducting constant dialogue and building up trust. For its part, the OSCE played an important role in resolving and investigating these conflicts through its missions on the ground.

But the OSCE also responded to the challenges posed by intolerance and discrimination to stability and security by creating institutions and formats aimed at

enhancing tolerance and fostering effective protection against discrimination, thus preventing new conflicts. In particular, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Representative on Freedom of the Media and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – or ODIHR for short – have become essential instruments for early warning and support.

And in the light of these new challenges, we have continued to work more closely with civil society within the OSCE.

Many of the measures against intolerance and discrimination that have been adopted since then stem from suggestions made by you, that is, by civil society groups and initiatives.

As regards prevention, monitoring, helping people and investigating intolerance and discrimination, your close contact with affected groups and groups at risk mean that you have access and expertise. And government agencies, the police and the judiciary can benefit significantly from this access and knowledge.

In its reporting on hate crimes in the OSCE region, for example, ODIHR is implementing recommendations made at the civil society pre-conferences in Bucharest in

2007 and in Astana in 2010. The relevant information is gathered and evaluated in close cooperation between ODIHR, local OSCE missions and large numbers of groups and organisations from civil society.

There are many other examples of how the OSCE has taken on input from civil society on fostering tolerance and many other examples of joint implementation.

I would like to highlight the establishment of the ODIHR Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues in 1994 and the OSCE Action Plan on Improving the Situation of Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area, which was adopted in

2003. The foundation of the independent ODIHR Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department in 2005, which has pooled and coordinated endeavours in this area under the

auspices of the OSCE and provided concrete input and guidance to the participating States since then, also came about as a result of input from civil society.

One example of the department's work can be seen in the teaching materials to address anti-Semitism that it developed in cooperation with the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam. In recent years, these materials have been used in the curricula of a large number of participating States.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our willingness to be tolerant, as well as the instruments to prevent and combat intolerance and discrimination, are currently facing new challenges.

Mobility in our globalised world and, in particular, the flows of migrants and refugees in recent times are making our societies more diverse.

This ever-growing diversity makes tolerance more vital than ever. Tolerance is the only way we will be able to cope with this diversity and, above all, to see it as an opportunity and a benefit, rather than as a threat.

But under these conditions, tolerance needs to be put into practice, demanded and defended on several levels, that is, on the political level, through the guarantee of fundamental rights, such as freedom of opinion, thought and religion, and the enforcement of bans on discrimination against the individual; on the societal level, through respect between different groups for other groups' traditions and religions; and on the interpersonal level, through our willingness as individuals to show tolerance towards orientations, opinions and actions that we may initially find alien and incomprehensible.

In the final analysis, as the US philosopher Michael Walzer once wrote – and I quote – “tolerating and being tolerated ... is the work of democratic citizens”.

We need these democratic citizens and their organisations in an active civil society in order to practise tolerance at all of these levels.

We need people to be actively committed to democratic values and human rights as the foundations of tolerance and non discrimination.

And we need greater sensitivity and a resolute stance against the growing animosity and hate speech in public space and social media. New and alarming forms of disseminating intolerance and hatred, which raise questions on the limits of freedom of expression, have emerged in the virtual world of the internet in particular.

We need to increase and pool our efforts and to constantly improve and expand our instruments as regards explaining such messages to young people and teaching them how to take a critical approach.

Human rights education in modules in schools and extracurricular training can help to foster mutual respect and tolerance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

All over Europe, including here in Germany, we will only be able to overcome the new challenges to the cohesion of our societies if we work closely with civil society and conduct an ongoing dialogue with our citizens.

The OSCE can play an even greater role here as regards fostering dialogue and trust within societies. One of the main aims of today's conference is to discuss relevant experiences and instruments.

We will present several programmes that we have set up in Germany to support civil society's activities in the field of tolerance and diversity.

In particular, the Live Democracy! programme, whose director Thomas Heppener will speak on one of the panels tomorrow, provides many NGOs with a means to develop their activities.

We also rely to a great extent on initiatives by actors from civil society as regards measures against the spread of hate speech in the internet. The web portal, Jugendschutz.net, is one of the projects supported by the German Government in the fight against hate speech, hate propaganda and hate crimes in social media. This service could not be run without the hard work and dedication of civil society.

In recent weeks, the German Institute for Human Rights published and launched an independent evaluation of Germany's implementation of its OSCE commitments in the field of human rights. The section on combating discrimination and hate crime, which includes input from NGOs, shows us that there is still a need for action and information here in Germany too, for example as regards collecting data on hate crime or training the police and judiciary.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference is a forum for discussion on new developments and challenges, but above all on experiences and ways to respond.

The focus today will be on four aspects, to which the OSCE participating States have already made extensive commitments:

- firstly, the importance of human rights education in promoting tolerance and diversity, whose importance was first underlined by the OSCE participating States at their meeting on the human dimension in Moscow in 1991;
- secondly, achieving the right balance between guaranteeing freedom of opinion, including in the internet, and dealing with racist, xenophobic or otherwise discriminatory statements;
- thirdly, setting up national institutions to enforce the ban on discrimination effectively and to adopt relevant strategies and action plans, as recommended by the Ministerial Council in Madrid in 2007;
- and finally, fourthly, actively supporting activities and partnerships in civil society to set up local, regional and national advice mechanisms to promote mutual respect and combat intolerance.

As this year's Chair of the OSCE, the implementation of commitments in the Organization's third dimension is a priority for Germany.

In the field of tolerance and non discrimination, there is a greater need for an effective implementation of the existing agreements and recommendations than for new declarations of intent and commitments. This is what we should focus on. This applies in particular to the new challenges we are facing.

That is why I would like to invite you to make use of your discussions here today to draw up very concrete recommendations, which can then be included in the talks among the OSCE participating States and experts tomorrow. In this way, let us continue the discussion that proved particularly productive in the field of tolerance and non discrimination in the past. We need this discussion more than ever today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to conclude by thanking all those who made today's conference possible through their commitment and input as speakers or moderators or their role in organising this event.

I would also like to thank the organisational team in the task force at the Federal Foreign Office and our colleagues at the Center for International Peace Operations.

Finally – and all too often this is forgotten – I would like to thank the interpreters who are already hard at work here enabling us to communicate in various languages.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Without further ado, I will now hand over to Almut Möller and three experienced experts who will explore the importance and challenges of cooperation between state and non-state actors in greater detail in the following discussion session.

I hope you will all have informative encounters and productive talks which feature the type of tolerance that is not based on endurance, but rather on active discussion and recognition of what may be uncomfortable opinions.

Thank you for listening.