

OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

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Session 3

Speech of Mr Mario Mauro

**Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson in Office on Combating
Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and
Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions.**

Racism, xenophobia and intolerance are, unfortunately, not an issue of the past. They are still present in today's society and manifest themselves in many different forms and remain a continued threat to peaceful co-existence and community cohesion in many parts of the OSCE region. This deep-rooted problem, due to the increasing insecurity that people feel about their future, it is likely to increase in the coming period.

Since my appointment as Personal Representative, we have witnessed an unprecedented collapse of the global economy which has affected all societies across OSCE region. However, some groups have felt the impact of the economic collapse much harder than other. The potential link between the economic crisis and racist incidents was noted in the Athens Ministerial Council Decision on Combating Hate Crimes, which recognized that the global economic downturn may increase incidents of hate crimes in the OSCE area. In Fact, due to their already vulnerable position, the effects of the economic crisis on migrants, refugees and minority groups within the OSCE region were especially harsh and have contributed to worsening their already unstable situation. In a depressed economy, migrants or minority groups are seen by the majority as competitors for jobs and social services and thus as a threat to their livelihoods or standard of living. This results in labelling minority group members as a burden to society. When such discourse is prevalent, it can lead to an increase in racist and xenophobic rhetoric. Such accusations can in return lead to increased racist sentiments and can worsen the social exclusion of migrants and minorities.

Situation of Roma and Sinti in many OSCE Participating States provides an illustration of this worrying trend. The past years have seen a rise in manifestations of intolerance

and violence against Roma. Series of attacks targeting Roma community and migrants resulting in death and serious injuries which occurred in several OSCE participating states in the last period, serve us as a reminder of the importance to pay more attention to root causes of racism and xenophobia. These episodes take place in an environment of open anti-Roma hate-speech, somehow tolerated or unabated by the mainstream. ODIHR's Status Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan on Improving the Situation on Roma and Sinti within the OSCE Area also identified some negative trends in a number of areas, and an increasing gap between the Roma population and the majority, in fields such as education, housing and employment

Despite a number of good practices and initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes and effects of racism and discriminations have been implemented across the OSCE, there still remains a worrying gap between the politically binding human dimension commitments and the actual implementation of these commitments across much of the OSCE region. There are many problems inhibiting effective responses to racism and xenophobia and intolerance. Amongst the most prominent ones are institutional barriers and challenges, which can sometimes impede positive policies and good intentions. Although comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation has been adopted recently in several countries, the effective implementation of such legislation remains a problem. In order to have any meaningful effect on the ground, there has to be a well structured implementation mechanism, supported by adequate resources and political will.

The fight against racism, xenophobia and discriminations is seen in the OSCE as an issue which requires systematic, comprehensive and long-term approach. In this regard, cooperation among intergovernmental organizations and coordination of their efforts addressing Racism, Xenophobia and other forms of intolerance is essential. A stance against racism, xenophobia and discriminations is urgently needed. Much needs to be done in order to address these complex issues effectively and to minimise their negative effects. It takes a lot of courage and determination, especially in the period of economic downturn, to support integration and inclusion policies and measures. However, it is the only way forward. If we do not apply the lessons we have learned from history, we are bound to repeat its mistakes. States and relevant stakeholders must unite in their efforts

and use all existing frameworks and resources to combat such phenomena and prevent further escalation of violence against those vulnerable groups of the population. In fact, stereotyping, marginalization, exclusion and non integration pose real threats to human dignity and to the stability and cohesion of our society at large. They can lead to anger, resentment and frustration, in extreme case even to hate and violence, shattering societies along ethnic, religious or any dividing lines. We must step up our efforts to ensure that intolerance and any form of discrimination in the OSCE region are rejected. We should ensure that there's no hierarchy among different forms of intolerance and discrimination. Therefore it's important to intensify targeted measures and transnational co-operation to combat all forms of intolerance reported by the OSCE.

In addition, I think that the fight against intolerance, discrimination and racism it is also a fight for freedom of religion and belief, since the exercise of this freedom is often affected by such plagues. Cases of intolerance and discrimination against Christians and members of other religions are present in the OSCE region. Therefore, dealing with this kind of discriminations is not a mere protection of the interests related to a specific category. On contrary, it's speaking out against the fact that today, in the world, people are discriminated or die because of their faith. Freedom of religion is without doubts an important factor to evaluate the respect of human rights at large. The episodes of intolerance and violence against Christians and member of other religions represent an injury and a challenge for the dignity of human beings.

In conclusion, the issue debated in this session represents a very important aspect of the mandate assigned to me by the Kazakhstan Chairmanship. I will follow with a lot of attention and interest all your remarks, which I'll surely take into account in carrying on my activities and country visits in the framework of OSCE agreements. I'm convinced that meeting like this one can only improve our capacity to respond, in the fields related to our different functions, to the raising problem of racism, xenophobia and discriminations toward religious or ethnic communities. Therefore, I would like to thank you all for the useful contribution you all will give to this debate and, of course, I would like to thank OSCE Chairmanship leaded by Kazakhstan for organizing in cooperation with ODIHR this important conference.