

High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination

Session 5

The role of education to promote mutual understanding and respect for diversity according to OSCE commitments

Statement of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)



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Check against delivery!

The OSCE participating States introduced strong commitments to use educational means to combat intolerance and discrimination in 2004 (MC.DEC 12/04, which endorsed PC.DEC 607, 621 and 633) and 2005 (MC.DEC 10/05).

In the 2005 MC.DEC in Ljubljana the participating States committed themselves to encourage public and private educational programmes that promote tolerance and non-discrimination, and raise public awareness of the existence and the unacceptability of intolerance and discrimination, and in this regard, to consider drawing on ODIHR expertise and assistance in order to develop methods and curricula for tolerance education in general, including:

- Fighting racial prejudice and hatred, xenophobia and discrimination;
- Education on and remembrance of the Holocaust, as well as other genocides, recognized as such in accordance with the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and crimes against humanity;
- Education on anti-Semitism in order to ensure a systematic approach to education, including curricula related to contemporary forms of anti-Semitism in participating States;
- Fighting prejudice, intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims and members of other religions;

ODIHR is happy to report that its expertise and assistance was used by several OSCE participating States, with whom ODIHR co-operates on education programmes to combat intolerance and discrimination.

ODIHR is co-operating with now 14 countries¹ on a project to combat anti-Semitism. Customized country versions of teaching materials to combat anti-Semitism are being developed and seminars for multipliers and educators are carried out. However, also in some of these 14 countries support from governmental institutions, especially Ministries of Education, is limited to good will. The dissemination of the materials and the training of teachers are in some of these countries left with ODIHR and its project partners.

In addition to these teaching tools, ODIHR has developed general guidelines for educators on how to address anti-Semitism in the classrooms with support of some OSCE participating States, which are downloadable from ODIHR's and its project partners websites.

In line with its mandate, ODIHR also has dealt with the promotion of Holocaust remembrance and assisted participating States with the development of resources for educators on how to prepare meaningful Holocaust commemoration events in educational settings.

ODIHR will invite Department Heads of Ministries of Education to Vienna on 7 and 8 November to review educational measures to combat anti-Semitism and will present good practices on education to combat this particular field of intolerance.

¹ Austria, Croatia, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands, Poland, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine;

In addition to educational tools to counter anti-Semitism, ODIHR, in partnership with UNESCO and the Council of Europe, is currently supporting the development of a Guidebook for Educators on combating intolerance against Muslims in schools. This activity aims to assist educators in identifying manifestations of intolerance against Muslims in school settings and providing practical suggestions on how to respond to and challenge this phenomenon through education. The guidelines will deal with a range of issues including anti-bias teaching, education for mutual understanding, curriculum development and whole school approaches, in relation to combating intolerance against Muslims.

The beneficiaries of these resources are multiple, including: education policy makers, teachers (both pre-service and in-service), curriculum developers, school authorities and teachers. Specific sets of recommendations will be developed for different targeted groups. Though they can have relevance for a variety of educational settings, the present project will aim primarily at the secondary level of education. It has been planned to produce the guidebook for educators on intolerance against Muslims in the first quarter of 2011. In the future, upon request, ODIHR will stand ready to develop complementary educational tools, in particular, country-specific teaching materials, to counter and challenge anti-Muslim stereotypes and prejudices.

Finally, acknowledging the relationship between intolerance against specific religious groups and knowledge about religions, ODIHR published the Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools (TGPs). These Guiding Principles were developed in line with Ministerial Council decision 13/06 which calls upon participating States “to address the root causes of intolerance and discrimination by encouraging the development of comprehensive domestic education policies and strategies [...] that promote a greater understanding of and respect for different cultures, ethnicities, religions or beliefs” with the aim to “prevent intolerance and discrimination, including against Christians, Jews, Muslims and members of other religions”.

The first “Key Guiding Principle” affirms that teaching about religions and beliefs must be provided in ways that are fair, accurate and based on sound scholarship. Students should learn about religions and beliefs in an environment respectful of human rights, fundamental freedoms and civic values.

It is important to highlight that in the TGPs, respect for human rights and for freedom of religion or belief pervade both the rationale for, and the approach to, teaching about religions and beliefs. Knowledge about religions and beliefs is seen as instrumental in reinforcing appreciation of the right to freedom of religion or belief in schools. The focus is on the respect for the right to hold religious or non-religious beliefs and not (only) on the respect for other religions or beliefs.

Despite a number of good initiatives known to ODIHR, we remind participating States of their commitments and call on participating States to increase their efforts and support for educational activities. We hope that this high level review conference will reinforce the

commitments of participating States to take serious and effective steps to combat discrimination and intolerance through education programmes.