



*Ministero degli Affari Esteri
e della Cooperazione Internazionale*



Rome International Conference on the Responsibility of States, Institutions and Individuals in the Fight against Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Area

Concept Paper

But you shall love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19, 18)

Concept and background

As OSCE Chairman-in-Office (CiO), Italy will host on January 29, 2018 an International Conference on the Responsibility of States, Institutions and Individuals in the Fight against Anti-Semitism in the OSCE Area. The event will be held in cooperation with the Organization of Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), ODIHR (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights), the Center for Contemporary Jewish Documentation (CDEC) and the Union of Italian Jewish Communities (UCEI).

One of the primary responsibilities of OSCE, an organization of 57 Participating States with 11 Partner Countries, is the mission to respect human rights and, thus, the fight against anti-Semitism. This initiative takes into account the wider context of our commitment against all forms of racism, xenophobia, discrimination, intolerance and hate crimes, including discrimination against Christians and Muslims. Extremism and fanaticism are nowadays a plague in politics and social life, aggravated by the accelerated propaganda tool of social media and the unwillingness to consider the other. Thus, the Conference will be an opportunity to define and analyze these phenomena.

Rome will be a significant venue. The continuous presence of the Jews in Rome dates back many centuries. The Arch of Titus testifies the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem on 70 C.E. by the Roman Army. It was the beginning of the Diaspora: a bimillennial history of an exile made of hope and desperation, continuity and persecution.

The end of January 2018 is also an appropriate timing to honor the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. On July 2000 Italy was one of the first countries to recognize January 27 as a day devoted to the duty of the memory of the Shoah and to the education against anti-Semitism.

Rabbi Prof. Giuseppe Vittorio Laras, chairman emeritus of the General Assembly of Italian Rabbis, wrote in his spiritual testament: nowadays it is necessary to rethink the day of the Memory of the Shoah, a day characterized by a crisis of sense and communication, especially as it relates to current anti-Semitism, a complex and heterogeneous phenomenon. Its specificity requires a continuous effort of monitoring, of study and of action.

Fighting Anti-Semitism is of fundamental importance and it can only be achieved with the full cooperation of Countries, Institutions and individuals. Holding this conference in Rome at the beginning of the 2018 OSCE CiO, testifies Italy's commitment. This is most relevant in the year that marks the 80th anniversary of the racial laws that were promulgated in the country in 1938, and in view of the upcoming Italian Presidency of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), a leading organization dedicated to the memory and education on the holocaust.

Proposed features of the event

The Conference will combine a high-level participation of both government delegations and independent institutions, as well as representatives of civil society and all citizens. The initiative will adopt a highly inclusive approach. The central theme will be the individual and collective responsibility in relation to the past, the present and the future.

The Conference will offer the opportunity to share opinions, experiences and best practices looking for cooperative approaches to deal with common issues. It will also serve as a platform to further develop dialogue and cooperation between Governments, institutions and individuals, in line with the OSCE commitments.

The plenary session, with the opening speeches by the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs Angelino Alfano, OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger and the Director of ODIHR Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir, will be dedicated to the responsibility of Countries, Institutions and Individuals.

Subsequently, four thematic panels will follow:

- *Panel 1: Responsibility: the role of law makers and civil servants*

Legislators, political actors, judges and prosecutors, law enforcers, diplomats and security forces should take institutional but also personal responsibility. They should be active in monitoring and reporting the problems. They should also promote and implement policies and legislations to avoid and persecute hate crimes and discrimination, assure freedom of religion and religious practices, and to address general concerns of security of the Jewish community. The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has developed the “Turning Words into Action to Address Anti-Semitism” project to strengthen the capacity of OSCE participating States and civil society to prevent and respond to anti-Semitism. The project, within the Office’s Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Programme, aims to help turn the commitments of OSCE participating States on combatting anti-Semitism into action by providing government officials, parliamentarians and civil society with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively do so. This is an example of good practices which could be shared at the conference.

How institutions and individual can be able to prevent and address dilemmas between respect of the law and moral obligations?

- *Panel 2: Responsibility: religion and anti-Semitism*

Religions should have an important role in promoting moral behavior and positive education. In 1965, the *Nostra Aetate* Declaration established new grounds for the relationship between Catholicism and Judaism. It was somehow a revolution, considering how certain forms of anti-Semitism had their beginning in the very city of Rome. A common commitment against the continuing phenomena of fanaticism and religious intolerance is now possible. When one faces the manipulation of religion to offend our neighbor, the common commitment of believers of all faiths should be: “*Not in His name*”. In this framework, it is important to universally respect all identities, including Jewish religious practices.

Which is the role of religious faith in building a tolerant and open society, where differences would be considered as a richness and not an obstacle?

- *Panel 3: Responsibility: the challenge of digital platforms*

In recent years we have witnessed a considerable increase in the number of racist, xenophobic and discriminatory expressions in social networks and on the Internet. The World Jewish Congress has found that more than 382,000 anti-Semitic posts were posted to social media platforms over the course of 2016 – an average of more than 43.6 posts per hour, or one post every 83 seconds.

This phenomenon can be countered in different ways such as by prosecuting those responsible, by spreading alternative and positive narratives, by sharing best practices and technology to enhance rapid detection and removal of hate content, and by preventing its further dissemination.

In what ways internet digital platforms should become an active partner in this task, safeguarding at the same time our values of freedom of expression?

- *Panel 4: Responsibility: the role of educators and sports*

Educational responsibility in schools and in sport is a crucial part of any efforts to combat racism, xenophobia and intolerance, radicalization and violence. Education as well as sports should raise awareness and recognition of diversity, cultural differences and individual freedom. At the same time, discrimination and hate incitement are tragically common in education and sport facilities. An important aspect of education is keeping the memory of Shoah and fighting holocaust denial and distortion.

How can we define teaching against anti-Semitism through knowledge of the past, and education to respecting the other? How can mentors in education and sports become leaders in developing a new awareness in young generations?

In conclusion, the Conference will provide an opportunity to reflect on how important the moral duty of responsibility is for everyone. Nobody should be indifferent, since anti-Semitism is not only an issue for Jews, but it touches everyone. The Rome Conference is intended to raise awareness on the urgent need to be all committed in the fight against anti-Semitism, as well as against all forms of racism, xenophobia, discrimination and intolerance.