

***OSCE High-Level Conference on  
Tolerance and Non-Discrimination***

***21-22 May 2013***

***Tirana, Albania***



**Opening Remarks by**

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure to be here today in Tirana for the opening of the OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. I would like to join other speakers in thanking our Albanian hosts and the OSCE's Ukrainian Chairmanship-in-Office for devoting priority attention to the topics on our agenda, which relate not only to the security of nation-states but also to the security of individual human beings. Today's gathering is the latest in a series of events held since 2003 in order to focus on ways in which the world's largest regional security organization can shine a spotlight on manifestations of intolerance and implement concrete measures to address both the ugly incidents of hate crime and the underlying roots of persistent discrimination. We can be proud of the renewed commitment of the OSCE to tackle the challenges of intolerance and discrimination with a view to securing peace and stability for all, from Vancouver to Ulaanbaatar.

There is a lot to be proud of indeed. The OSCE participating States have adopted a comprehensive range of commitments in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination, notably Ministerial Council Decision 9/09 on hate crime, a document that is unequalled among international standards. The OSCE participating States have collectively allocated resources to ensure that words would translate into reality. The establishment in 2005 of the tolerance and non-discrimination department at ODIHR is a tangible proof of this commitment. Year after year, despite challenging budget negotiations both at the multilateral and the national level, governments continue to provide both regular and voluntary contributions to our Office in order to undertake the daunting tasks they have entrusted to it in such areas as curriculum development, law enforcement training, and capacity building on tolerance, non-discrimination, combating hate crime and promoting religious freedom.

We also have reasons to be worried as well. Let me mention two issues. The first one is that manifestations of intolerance continue to occur regularly across the OSCE region. Year after year, as documented in ODIHR's annual report on hate crime, hate-motivated incidents and crimes such as threats, assaults, vandalism, desecrations of places of worship, arson attacks or even murder are reported across the OSCE region. There is not a month passing by without a horrendous crime involving bias and prejudice leading to extreme violence and the death of the victim. Although participating States have committed themselves to record and report hate-motivated incidents and crimes, we still lack comprehensive, reliable and accessible data for much of the region. Reported cases reflect only anecdotal evidence of the extent and the nature of the challenges faced by individuals and communities, generally among minorities who have been the victims of historical institutional discrimination.

ODIHR has repeatedly stressed that underreporting of hate crimes and incidents prevents governments from seeing the problem, from taking the right decisions and from implementing these decisions. The first step is to equip police with basic skills to identify and to investigate hate crimes, and to sensitize prosecutors and the courts to the necessity of applying legislation – generally at hand in most OSCE participating States – that foresees aggravated sentences for offenders. It is then necessary to collect and to process the recorded information in a manner that is comprehensive, accessible and co-ordinated among different governmental actors. Finally, it is crucial to involve the affected communities and civil society in general when designing and implementing these programmes. The best police training will not bear fruit if victims do not come forward to report incidents. This means that confidence has to be built between police and affected communities and that civil society actors have to be aware of the nature of the phenomenon, and of their rights. Let me stress at this point that these three areas – criminal justice system, data collection and civil society outreach and capacity building – are at the core of ODIHR's assistance programmes.

No participating State is immune to hate-motivated crimes and incidents. Bias and prejudice exist in one form or another everywhere. This means that it is definitely our collective responsibility to prevent and respond to manifestations of intolerance. This brings me to the second issue of concern that I would like to raise, as I think we can all agree on the need to join forces in focusing attention on the plight of the victims of intolerance and the implementation of effective strategies to reduce human suffering. In this context, we may ask ourselves whether lengthy negotiations on the agenda of this conference and the resulting, rather rushed, preparations have allowed us to secure the the broadest possible outreach to key audiences – including the targeted individuals and communities who deserve our full attention. I am afraid that this question answers itself.

To conclude, I will say a few words about a priority of the Ukrainian Chairmanship which should be a starting point for all of our efforts – prevention. As mentioned earlier, no society is immune to bias and prejudice. This is why it is important that governments do not cut resources dedicated to addressing these phenomena by improving understanding and mutual respect in increasingly diverse societies. In this regard, I would like to stress that ODIHR has also developed educational programmes to address specific manifestations of intolerance: our teaching materials to fight anti-Semitism are now in use in 14 participating States; our guidelines for educators to address intolerance and discrimination against Muslims that were developed jointly with UNESCO and the Council of Europe are being disseminated across the region. Finally, we have developed teaching materials to address bias and intolerance against Roma that have been in use in the Western Balkans since last year.

It will not come as a surprise if my last appeal will be for the participating States to renew and more importantly to implement their commitments to prevent and respond to intolerance and discrimination in the framework of conflict prevention. This means that we need to leverage the political will that is necessary to embrace

these programmes and provide the adequate resources to implement them, to monitor their use and to evaluate their impact.

Thank you very much for your attention.