

OSCE HUMAN DIMENSION IMPLEMENTATION MEETING
Warsaw, 23 September – 4 October 2013

Working session 1: Tolerance and non-discrimination I:

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- **National minorities;**
- **Preventing aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism**

Mr./Ms. Moderator,

I would like to start with congratulations to Ms. Astrid Thors on her appointment as High Commissioner on National Minorities and wish all the best to her in the future work.

Many issues related to national minorities remain challenging and sensitive at the same time. In case of the OSCE, this subject has its particular place within the broader framework of many other topics dealt with by the Organization and is considered in the context of early warning and conflict prevention as one of the main components of the Organization's activities aimed at strengthening the regional cooperation.

In this respect, it is very important that issues pertaining to minorities were considered in the general context of human rights and equality. That in turn, guarantees security, one of basic elements of which is the protection of human rights, including rights of national minorities. All these questions are interconnected and interdependent.

With regard to the rights of minorities and prevention of aggressive nationalism, racism and chauvinism, we should clearly identify the role of different actors, including governments, local authorities, civil society and the media. When we speak about the role of government in realization of minority rights we should stress the importance of promoting human rights and guarantee equality - both in law and in practice.

Mr./Ms. Moderator,

Freedom of expression is one of the key components in the context of human rights protection and here I should underline the importance of dissemination of information on the protection of minority rights, creation of conditions for publication of newspapers and magazines, as well as broadcasting in minority languages. Having said this, there should also be the strongest possible prohibition on the use of mass media – television, radio, newspapers and the Internet – for propagation of racism and dissemination of hatred towards other nations and national minorities.

We often speak about the importance of human rights and tolerance education that promote respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, but I would like to emphasize that we should start this kind of education at the earliest possible age.

Unfortunately this approach is not accepted by all OSCE participating States. Some countries in the OSCE area publish textbooks where national minorities are described with negative connotations due to whatever political authoritarian visioning.

Unfortunately, this official vision also gives ground for distorting the functions of national Ombudsman in some countries. For example, in Azerbaijan the Ombudsperson operates as the Government's tool, and is just an annex to the executive branch which disseminates hatred not only towards other nations all around the world, but also towards Azerbaijan's own minorities. As a result, the country's minorities do not bring their issues and complaints to the Ombudsperson's office, because they are afraid that this will inevitably result in reprisals and further crackdowns against them.

It is impossible not to see the horrendous link between the government-sponsored racist/xenophobic policies and misinformation campaign, and the actions of some of its citizens aimed against national minorities and other nations, culminating in killing people based on their national identity.

Mr./Ms. Moderator,

While we speak about vulnerability of minorities, we must keep in mind that those minority groups that do not have a kin state are particularly vulnerable, because rarely other States will take care of their interests. Therefore, these minority groups need particular attention and protection. Having said this, I would like to share the positive experience of my country; in Armenia, we have minorities like Yezidis and Assyrians. Incorporation of these groups within the palette of national minorities is equally both an asset enriching our culture and also a measure of responsibility for the state committed to stipulate the preservation and development of these ethnic groups living in Armenia.

Among positive steps undertaken by my Government in the area of protection of minority rights I can inter alia mention considerable efforts made in promotion of ethnic minority education and culture. There are no time limits set out for private broadcasting stations for ethnic-minority programmes. The budget allocated to the national minorities by Armenian Government has been doubled this year.

We are looking forward to a continued, close and good cooperation in promoting the values of multilateralism - human rights and peaceful resolution of conflicts.

Thank you