



## United States Mission to the OSCE

### **Session 14 - Right of Reply Fundamental Freedoms II, including: Freedom of thought, conscience, religion, or belief**

Delivered by Kari Johnstone, Director of the Office for International Religious Freedom, U.S. Department of State  
**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting**  
Warsaw, October 1, 2014

By now, it should be clear that anti-Semitism remains a problem throughout the OSCE region, and the United States is no exception. This is precisely why we believe that the upcoming Berlin Conference on anti-Semitism is so important and why we urge all OSCE participating States (pS) to send high-level delegations with the purpose of constructively engaging in an exchange of ideas for combatting anti-Semitism in the region. We note the importance of robust debate to condemn anti-Semitism and change minds -- a long-term goal, to be sure -- and call on all pS to take prompt actions to prevent and prosecute acts of violence in the short term.

Anti-Muslim sentiment also remains an unfortunate reality in many states. The United States government has taken substantial and specific efforts since 2001 to help prevent acts of discrimination against Muslims. Our Department of Justice and Department of Homeland Security regularly convene meetings with Muslim communities to discuss civil rights issues, including discrimination. We have actively enforced laws to protect Muslims from discrimination in employment, housing, education, and in building places of worship and religious schools. To provide just two examples, our Department of Justice has opened 14 investigations and brought four lawsuits to protect the right of Muslim communities to build mosques and schools. And the US government has successfully pursued legal action to allow Muslims to wear religious head coverings and participate in the hajj.

We reiterate our strong support for the Kyiv ministerial decision on Freedom of Religion and Belief and note in particular the importance of the inclusion of the provision of the rights of non-believers.

Finally, I would like to note that the promotion of so-called "traditional values" has never been and never will be an excuse for abrogating individual rights. When we hear states attempt to justify limitations on freedom on the grounds of traditional values, we should call it out for the cynical and insidious act that it is. It is through defending the freedom of religion, conscience, and belief, and defending other human rights, that we may best advance the ability of individuals to exercise all of their human rights, including those individuals who subscribe to so-called traditional values.