



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Chairmanship-in-Office's Three Personal Representatives for Tolerance

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 7, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The United States welcomes today's important discussion of intolerance and discrimination in the OSCE region. We are pleased that the Chairmanship's Personal Representatives for Tolerance, Ambassador Adil Akhmetov, Ambassador Tetiana Izhevskaya, and Rabbi Andrew Baker are able to join us at the Permanent Council.

We commend the Personal Representatives for their efforts over this past year and we appreciate their partnership, country visits, and participation in OSCE events. In particular, the United States thanks them for their support of this year's High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination hosted by Albania. The Personal Representatives play a vital role in promoting the protection and inclusion of persons belonging to minorities as well as drawing attention to areas where governments need to make critical progress. Too frequently, we are reminded of the urgent work that remains for the Personal Representatives, for the OSCE, and for participating States.

November 9th marks the 75th anniversary of Kristallnacht – the Night of Broken Glass – when 267 synagogues and 7500 businesses owned by Jews, as well as Jewish homes, schools, and hospitals, were destroyed or damaged by Nazi paramilitaries and at least 91 persons were killed in Nazi Germany and parts of Austria. The voices speaking out against the events of Kristallnacht were few indeed. Very few governments condemned the violence and very few religious voices protested the cruelty perpetrated against Jews. As we remember Kristallnacht, let it reinforce not only our responsibility as government officials, but our personal responsibility as well - to speak out against and combat all forms of hatred and intolerance.

As my friend the Ambassador of Turkey has already noted, and as the United States and others also noted with concern at this year's HDIM, a significant number of NGOs made statements that reflected bias against Muslims during Session 2 on religious tolerance, and throughout the HDIM. The United States also remains concerned about onerous religious registration requirements and restrictive religion laws in several participating States that are applied discriminatorily against members of so-called nontraditional religions, including Protestants, Jehovah's Witnesses, Scientologists, and readers of Said Nursi. In my own country, nearly two out of three religion-based hate crimes are committed against Jews. All of these sad examples of religious intolerance speak loudly to the importance of their work, in particular, their country visits and subsequent reports.

The United States notes that during the time of their brief visit to Greece in September, an anti-fascist activist was murdered by a supporter of the Golden Dawn Party. The Greek public and the government reacted as they should – with horror. Government representatives reacted in a similar way when two Golden Dawn members were murdered and a third one seriously wounded in a recent shooting. We welcome the strong position taken by the Greek government, including by Prime Minister Samaras, against extremist violence.

These incidents are yet another example of how prejudice and hate can fuel violence and insidious harassment against members of racial, religious, and ethnic minorities such as Jews, Muslims, and Roma as well as other vulnerable populations including lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals.

It is worth recalling that the OSCE has a rich body of commitments in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination. We welcome efforts by participating States, with ODIHR's support, to focus on implementation of our common goals. We urge participating States to enact appropriate legislation, to collect disaggregated data on hate crimes, to provide appropriate training to law enforcement, to provide assistance to victim communities, to engage with civil society on common efforts, and to promote integration of minority groups. We encourage participating States to make use of ODIHR's resources including its law enforcement hate crimes training that can assist in addressing the problem.

As the OSCE continues to work in this area next year, we encourage the Swiss Chairmanship and the Troika to consult closely with the Personal Representatives and ODIHR to support their important work. We would like to see an enhanced focus on, and standardized approach to, country visits and subsequent reports. We would like greater engagement when incidents do occur – whether through public statements or private engagement with national officials.

It is imperative for all of us to model and teach tolerance and non-discrimination. No participating State is immune from intolerance, and we must work to prevent discrimination and hatred in all their ugly forms from gaining currency in our societies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.