

Translation

OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight against  
Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination  
Session 1: "Legislative and institutional mechanisms and  
governmental action including law enforcement"

Statement by Claudia Roth, Federal Government Commissioner for Human Rights Policy and  
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Mr Chairman,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am deeply disturbed that racism, xenophobia and discrimination in their most odious forms continue to manifest themselves in the OSCE area and beyond. They are an attack on the very heart of our democratic order which is based on tolerance and respect for the dignity of every individual.

Racism, xenophobia and discrimination concern us all. As long as people are persecuted, marginalized, discriminated against, harassed or insulted due to their origin, the colour of their skin, their faith, their sex or their sexual identity, our full attention and vigorous action are essential. As long as firebombs are thrown at hostels for asylum-seekers, racist slogans are daubed on walls, as long as those of a different religion are taunted or politicians pander to xenophobic sentiments, we must not relent in our fight against racism, discrimination and xenophobia.

For how we treat our fellow human beings, whether they are pale or dark-skinned, whether they are Christian, Moslem or Jewish, whether they are male or female, shows how open and democratic our societies really are. Every attack against an individual with a different skin colour and every derisive remark made to those of a different religion demonstrate intolerance and a lack of respect for others. They are a declaration of war on our democratic and open society – a declaration of war which we must all be prepared to confront.

The Brussels Conference on Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination has risen to this challenge with great determination. In addition to the Bulgarian chairmanship, we would like to expressly thank our host, the Belgian Government, which has organized this high-ranking conference in this cosmopolitan and international city.

Here in Brussels, we want to seek solutions together and to agree on concrete measures to fight racism, xenophobia and discrimination. My colleague, Marieluise Beck, has already outlined what we in Germany are doing to counter these dangerous phenomena.

I am pleased that this conference will once again take advantage of one of the OSCE's particular strengths: close cooperation among government representatives and civil-society groups and associations, parliamentarians and journalists. For the fight against intolerance is a task for society as a whole which requires the commitment of the state and civil society in equal measure.

We can only successfully prevent racist, anti-Moslem, xenophobic and anti-Semitic attacks from being concealed, condoned and accepted if we work together in close cooperation. We can only ensure that our citizens stand up and protect fellow human beings who are under attack or marginalized if we coordinate our efforts. We are all called upon to champion the idea that the diversity of ethnic groups, cultures and religions in our societies is not a threat but, rather, a boon for everyone which must be defended.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This conference is important to us, just as important as the Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism. I therefore hope that we can translate our will to fight intolerance into concrete political action. I hope that this conference will create visible standards in the OSCE area. Brussels should become synonymous with a strong condemnation of all forms of intolerance. Brussels should mark the launch of comprehensive measures to register and fight racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

Following the Berlin Conference on Anti-Semitism and the Paris Conference on hate propaganda on the Internet, this conference completes the series of OSCE meetings on intolerance. Our task now must be to implement the conclusions of the Berlin, Paris and Brussels meetings.

We must do what needs to be done and, in turn, help the OSCE do its work. Mr Chairman, you have a special responsibility in this respect as the head of the ODIHR. We will gladly contribute what we can to this endeavour.

With a view to the OSCE Ministerial Council in Sofia, we should also consider whether and how we can lend greater force and greater visibility to our efforts in the fight against intolerance. In doing so, we should stick by our tried-and-tested approach: we should take into account the links between the different types of intolerance while, at the same time, remembering their individual forms, for example xenophobia and anti-Semitism.

Ultimately, the important thing, and this applies both to this conference and to the fight against intolerance as a whole, is that we make real, tangible progress.

On that note, I hope that we can transform the OSCE into a force to be reckoned with in the fight for tolerance and human dignity. I hope that this conference will make a key contribution towards this goal.

Thank you!