

**Statement of State Secretary Magda Vášáryová at the
OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism and on Other Forms of Intolerance**

(Cordoba, 8 June 2005, Opening session)

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me first express my thanks to our Spanish hosts and the Slovenian presidency for organising this important event. I particularly appreciate the choice of this magnificent historic town for this venue. Throughout centuries, Cordoba had been a place where different cultures and religions were meeting. It is symbolic that it is here, that we speak about tolerance. We are privileged to admire the invaluable spiritual and cultural heritage that was born out of the inspiring atmosphere of unity in diversity.

The history of the European continent offers scores of examples of peaceful coexistence and fruitful dialogue among different races, nations, religions and cultures. However, our history had also been witness to bloody conflicts, wars, genocides and persecution that were often engendered by ideologies based on intolerance and hatred. The recent anniversary of the end of World War II represented an occasion to remember again how brutal and devastating can be the consequences of discrimination and racial hatred. Millions of victims of the cruellest expression of racial hatred must be a memento also for future generations, reminding us and them of the danger and evil of intolerance.

In spite of a high level of political stability, economic development and democracy, Europe is still confronted with various manifestations of intolerance and discrimination, fortunately, not in its brutal dimensions. However, any expression of our indifference or disregard for such expressions can have fatal consequences.

It is crucial for the Slovak Republic, that the international community is not oblivious and jointly strives to counter this dangerous phenomenon. We associated ourselves with the UN Durban Declaration and Programme of Action from 2001 and fully support its comprehensive implementation.

Slovakia considers the intensified OSCE activities an integral part of the global efforts for elimination of racism, xenophobia, and other forms of intolerance and discrimination. We welcome and actively support them.

Let me, however, underline the essential role of the implementation of commitments relating to tolerance. This is the space where Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE can be engaged.

Exchange of experience and best practices, and cooperation in the field of legislation and education must bring concrete results. It is important to raise public awareness of discrimination and tolerance issues, using all means of information. Three major OSCE conferences held last year in Berlin, Paris and Brussels, also thanks to their broad coverage and a wide public response played a positive role in this regard.

Intolerance builds on prejudice, ignorance and lack of culture. Reversed, tolerance is born out of a dialogue and mutual enrichment. Learning about different cultures, attaching them the same significance, as the own one is necessary to counter self-destructive ignorance. This is a difficult task. But it is feasible thanks to its noble objective being, the most appropriate prevention against spreading of intolerance. Education helps young people to learn about the crimes triggered by intolerance, which they had not witnessed themselves. In contrast to repression, education has a preventive and long-term effect.

This is why the Slovak Republic attaches such a great significance to education when dealing with different forms of intolerance.

The Slovak Government adopted an Action Plan on the Prevention of All Forms of Discrimination, Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Other Expressions of Intolerance for the 2004 – 2005 period. This is already the third consecutive document of this kind. It lays emphasis on the activities of state authorities and non-governmental organisations aimed at development of a multicultural society, understanding and mutual knowledge among different groups of the population. Projects are oriented on improvement of human rights awareness, prevention of discrimination, racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and other forms of intolerance. The 2004 – 2005 action plan draws attention to another new and topical issue – migration. It improves information about asylum seekers who belong to the most endangered groups of potential discrimination.

Based on the Action Plan, we approved the National Plan of Human Rights Education for the 2005 – 2014 period. The activities envisaged in the plan focus on pupils and students, educational staff, and on the development of teaching texts concerning topical issues in the prevention of anti-Semitism and of other forms of intolerance.

Besides these framework documents, we also organize events specifically targeting pupils of primary and secondary schools. Let me mention at least two of them. A national competition of secondary school students – the Human Rights Olympiad – was held already for the seventh time this year. Almost 3000

students participated in this year's round alone. Another example is the Holocaust Memorial Day, which we commemorate every year on 9th September at primary and secondary schools.

In this regard, we highly appreciate the work of the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF), in which Slovakia participates within the Liaison Project Working Group. I want to use this opportunity to confirm the intention of the Slovak Republic to obtain full membership in 2006. All the necessary steps are taken to prepare the accession at the December plenary session in Poland. We count on support of the current 20 members and extend our special thanks to Germany for its comprehensive assistance.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude expressing my conviction that the Cordoba conference will successfully follow up on the previous OCSE activities and will provide an impetus for implementing the existing commitments within the OSCE region.