

ENGLISH only

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting  
Freedom of Religion or Belief: Issues, Opportunities and the Specific Challenges of  
Combating Anti-Semitism and Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians,  
Muslims and Members of Other Religions

Session 1 Freedom of religion or belief, non-discrimination and other human rights  
and fundamental freedoms as the essential normative basis for peaceful coexistence  
and security in the OSCE region

As delivered by

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OSCE

Mr. Moderator,

We thank the OSCE Austrian Chairmanship and the ODIHR for dedicating the  
first Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting to the topic of freedom of religion or  
belief.

Our thanks go to distinguished introducers for their thoughtful presentations.

Freedom of religion or belief is the only human right and fundamental  
freedom which is directly referred in the principles of Helsinki Final Act. It is also an  
inalienable human right and its respect should be absolute without any conditionality.

Currently the OSCE area faces the challenge of violation of human rights and  
fundamental freedoms, including freedom of religion or belief under the pretext of  
countering terrorism. Religious minorities in some OSCE participating States are  
facing serious curbing of their rights and freedoms, including attempts of  
expropriation of religious property. Another pressing issue is interference of the state  
authorities into the internal organizational matters of religious communities.

We call on the participating States to live up with their obligations under  
international treaties and OSCE commitments grant full protection to the religious  
sites, including churches. In this regard we would also like to refer to the OSCE Kiev  
Ministerial Decision on the freedom of religion and belief, which refers to the return  
of religious property.

Another challenge in the OSCE area is invoking religious solidarity also in the  
framework of other international organizations to promote one's own conflict  
perception. Such a policy doesn't facilitate solution of long standing disputes, but  
rather introduces another dimension of tensions. Needless to say that security based  
on religious solidarity contradicts the OSCE norms, commitments and values.

We believe that OSCE is an appropriate forum to discuss issues of ensuring  
freedom of religion or belief also in its immediate neighbourhood, where religious  
groups face existential threats. This situation in the OSCE neighbourhood is  
inseparably linked to the security of the OSCE region. In this regard we would like to  
underline the need to streamline countering religious extremism and radicalization in

the OSCE region and beyond in the activities of the OSCE and its executive structures and institutions. We encourage the OSCE ODIHR to streamline countering religious extremism in its activities in close cooperation with the Council of Europe and its European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

Thank You.