



United States Mission to the OSCE

UN Human Rights Day

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 10, 2015

Today we celebrate UN Human Rights Day, established to mark the adoption of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. This year's theme "Our Rights. Our Freedoms. Always." signals the launch of a year-long UN campaign for the 50th anniversary of the two International Covenants on Human Rights: the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 1966.

As we reflect on the ideals and obligations embodied in these documents, we are again reminded of the wisdom and significance of the Helsinki Final Act, and of the commitments that followed in Copenhagen, Paris, Istanbul, Astana and elsewhere. Respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is an essential component of our comprehensive approach to security, and we affirm that all governments are responsible for the protection and advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms, whether exercised online or off. It is crucial that governments engage with their citizens and civil society in a serious and sustained dialogue about protecting and advancing human rights. Such a dialogue becomes all the more necessary in times of tension, insecurity and conflict.

We share the regret expressed by others that a number of valuable decisions were blocked by a small handful of delegations last week. We share a broad range of concerns and issues that they have focused on. But I want to take a moment to focus on one issue that intersects with some of our security challenges in the OSCE area today.

As we mourn the loss of our citizens in recent terror attacks, counter violent extremism and radicalization that leads to violence, and combat the threat presented by ISIL and other terrorist organizations, we must simultaneously reaffirm our obligation to uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms, and reject discrimination and intolerance in all their ugly forms.

Last weekend President Obama addressed the American people on the recent terrorist attack in California, and the threat from terrorism, and he said:

"We cannot turn against one another by letting this fight be defined as a war between America and Islam. That, too, is what groups like ISIL want....Muslim leaders here and around the globe have to continue working with us to decisively and unequivocally reject the hateful ideology that groups like ISIL and al Qaeda promote; to speak out against not just acts of violence, but also those interpretations of Islam that are incompatible with the values of religious tolerance, mutual respect, and human dignity. But just as it is the responsibility of Muslims around the world to root out misguided ideas that lead to radicalization, it is the responsibility of all Americans -- of every faith -- to reject discrimination. It is our

responsibility to reject religious tests on who we admit into this country. It's our responsibility to reject proposals that Muslim Americans should somehow be treated differently. Because when we travel down that road, we lose.”

This message applies to the current situation in the United States, and I share it with you because it also applies to participating States throughout the entire OSCE region. As we address the threat of terrorism and counter violent extremism and radicalization that leads to violence, we must protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and speak out against prejudice and hate. This rights-based approach applies equally to any actions participating States may take to address their security, in keeping with the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.

As we said last week in Belgrade, too many of our shared commitments to protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, and to counter intolerance and hatred remain unimplemented. The failures of participating States to implement their OSCE commitments do not make the fundamental truth underlying the OSCE concept of comprehensive security any less true: States with governments that respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, that foster shared prosperity through openness and good governance, and that respect the rules of the international system—including the sovereignty and territorial integrity of their neighbors—are states that are more stable, more resilient, and more innovative; that are better partners and better able to provide a stronger future for their people.

We, therefore, welcome the message of “Our Rights. Our Freedoms. Always.,” and will continue to do our part to increase awareness of, and respect for the exercise, of human rights and fundamental freedoms online and off, today and every day.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.