

Statement of the Head of the Delegation of Ukraine
Mrs. Natalia Zarudna,
Deputy Foreign Minister of Ukraine
(OSCE Conference on Anti-Semitism, Vienna, 18.06.03)

Mr. Chairman,

Ukraine views the problem of combating anti-Semitism manifestations in the wider context of combating intolerance, discrimination and xenophobia through development and strengthening of a dialog among cultures and civilizations with a special emphasis on prevention policies and practices.

Being a multiethnic and multicultural state, Ukraine for the years of its independence has accumulated a vast experience in this regard. I should say that fortunately there was no increase or outburst of anti-Semitic incidents in recent years in Ukraine.

Moreover, we witness further development of understanding and mutual respect between representatives of various ethnic and religious groups as a result of combined efforts and emerging partnership between the Ukrainian government institutions and non-governmental organizations, both secular and religious.

Ukraine has a solid legal framework of securing rights of national and religious minorities. The foundations of the Ukraine's policy in this field have been laid by its Constitution, the Declaration on Rights of Nationalities in Ukraine, and by the following laws: *On National Minorities*, *On Local Self-Government*, *On Associations of Citizens*, and *On Printed Mass Media (Press) in Ukraine*.

We have no statistics as to the crimes on ethnic, language or cultural grounds in Ukraine for the very simple fact that no hate crimes have been reported there since relevant articles have been introduced into the Ukraine's Criminal Code. The central and local authorities' response to any incidents of this nature have been quick and adequate.

Our state is a party to the Framework Convention on Protection of National Minorities. Just recently the President of Ukraine signed the Law "On Ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages". By this law Ukraine has set an absolute European record since under this document the Charter's provisions will be applied to 14 languages of ethnic minorities, including the Jewish minority. To comply with these obligations Ukraine will have to make

annually additional appropriations in its central and local budgets amounting to US \$200 mln., which would be quite a challenge!

Our experience proves that the role of NGOs and other civil society's institutions in monitoring the trends in manifestation of intolerance, in awareness raising and promoting intercultural dialog in the society can hardly be underestimated.

The government alone cannot create tolerance and understanding but it must provide a safe and secure environment in which every member of a multiethnic society could preserve and develop his or her cultural heritage and make it familiar to people of other ethnicities.

We proceed from the well known fact that **ignorance is one of the major reasons of intolerance**. Hence, the first task both for the government institutions and for the NGOs is to familiarize all citizens with cultures, history, traditions and customs of national minorities living in the country, most specifically with rich Jewish culture which throughout the centuries has become a part and parcel of the local culture as well. Here we can find many examples in Ukraine, such as initiated by Jewish organizations annual international festivals of theatrical arts "Wandering Stars", Jewish musical festivals "Shalom, Ukraine", etc.

Second task relates to the **remembrance of the devastating results of intolerance for the societies**, most notably to the lessons of Holocaust. Here we can talk about establishing museums, special research centers and foundations in memory of the victims of the Nazism, such as Babiy Yar Memorial, collection of documents and publication of such editions like "Jewish Encyclopedia of Ukraine" as well as introduction of the Holocaust studies in school and university curricula.

It is essential for the state to support initiatives of NGOs, and whenever it is appropriate to make them a part of the state policy. One example: back in 1996 the Center of Jewish Education in Kiev and the Scientific and Educational Center "Tkuma" in Dnipropetrovsk launched a number of workshops on methodology of teaching Holocaust lessons in schools. Later the Ministry of Education introduced such lessons into the curricula of all Ukrainian schools and special courses into the university programs, and used this methodology for preparing text-books on this issue.

The third task is **to launch a permanent and diversified intercultural, and most specifically – inter-confessional dialog in the society**, to foster tolerance and mutual understanding, create or support already existing necessary mechanisms for it. The Ukrainian authorities in cooperation with major Jewish organization in Ukraine are currently working on a National Program on Tolerance Education which will be based on the rich experience of this

organization. The All-Ukrainian Church Council is another example of such mechanism successfully working in Ukraine.

These are just very few examples of fruitful cooperation between the state and NGO in this area. In general, the Jewish minority in Ukraine is quite numerous (103.6 thousand according to the official data), active and vocal. Currently, there are over 100 Jewish associations and organizations in Ukraine, five of them have an all-Ukrainian status.

Major activities of these NGOs are focused on revival of Jewish customs and traditions, comprehensive development of Yiddish and Hebrew languages and education, including the Holocaust education, promotion of amateur and professional Jewish art, safeguarding historical and cultural heritage, monitoring and protection of social and other rights of Jewish population, information and mass-media activities.

Over 20 media outlets cover the Jewish issues, including the state-sponsored supplement to the parliament's official newspaper *Jewish News*. Five schools provide education in Hebrew and Yiddish alongside 60 similar Sunday schools, 12 Jewish school groups and 10 kindergartens. Four professional and 20 amateur theatres and folk groups familiarize the Ukrainian public with Jewish culture. In addition, 221 Jewish religious communities secure the revival of Judaism in Ukraine.

The process of restitution of property of Jewish communities is being supported by the Ukrainian Government. 55 out of 109 synagogues have already been handed over for the use of Jewish community. Ukraine will make further steps in the issue of restitution of property of Jewish communities.

Nevertheless, we are well aware how sensitive and delicate are the issues of minorities' rights and how fragile the peace in the society might become if even the subtle manifestations of the ethnical or religious intolerance, anti-Semitism included, go unnoticed and do not meet an adequate response from public institutions and the society itself.

In closing, we would like to make the following proposals:

- to invite the OSCE Permanent Council to study possible follow-up actions;
- to urge the High Commissioner on national minorities and ODIHR to pay particular attention to all aspects of anti-Semitism;
- to promote cooperation between Governments and NGOs in preventing and responding to anti-Semitism;
- to assist in adopting or reviewing national laws in adherence to international legislation standards;
- to establish quick-reaction mechanism in order to address anti-Semitism cases in the OSCE member-states timely and in proper manner.

