



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

### **Statement on Promoting Tolerance, Respect for Diversity and Non-Discrimination through Education and Media, particularly among the Younger Generation**

As delivered by Ambassador Stephan M. Minikes  
to the OSCE Conference on Tolerance and the Fight Against Racism, Xenophobia  
and Discrimination, Brussels  
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Thank you, Madam Chair.

Promoting tolerance, respect for diversity, and non-discrimination through education and the media, particularly among the younger generation, is perhaps the most important of the topics that we are discussing at this conference.

The younger generation is our future, and we all fervently desire for them to live in a world that is peaceful and democratic. Such a world must necessarily be based on the principles of tolerance and equality.

Unfortunately, in many of the countries in the OSCE region, children learn from their teachers and the media that there are two kinds of people – “us” and “them.” Too many children are taught that something about the “Other” is inherently wrong, or suspicious, or even dangerous.

Where the real danger lies, however, is in looking at the world in these negative terms. By teaching a history of conflict and of “ancient” ethnic and religious rivalries, we only perpetuate intolerance of other cultures, religions, and ethnic identities.

The truth is that the history of the world is neither a history of conflict nor a history of overriding differences. It is a history that has seen sometimes hundreds of years of interethnic peace and cooperation that have prevailed between wars.

The constant drumbeat of the media also tends to characterize conflicts as primordial “clashes of civilizations,” rather than as contemporary disagreements over power, resources, or territory. This approach, too, can instigate fear of, and prejudice against, other cultures and groups.

Each of the 55 OSCE participating States is home to a diverse population. Schools and media in these countries should serve to unite these populations in favor of the common values of freedom, democracy, and stability, not to divide them.

Fortunately, young people who have been taught to see the commonalities among the different groups in society, and who have been taught to debate the issues using facts and logic, rather than emotion and prejudice, will reject the ethnic card whenever and wherever it is played by these politicians.

And that should be one of our really important goals here, because it is achievable; it can be done. We know how to do it.

In a landmark 1993 report, the American Psychological Association documented what has been intuitively known by man since the beginning of humankind, which is that education is a powerful tool that can alter negative attitudes and reduce discrimination and violence based on bias.

The schools and the media can combat intolerance by making an effort to report events that portray minorities in a positive and unbiased light. Textbooks and newspapers should report news of interethnic peace and cooperation, not just news of war. Good news, based on facts, well presented, can also sell.

Finally, the best way to promote tolerance and non-discrimination is to ensure that all groups in society enjoy equal access to education and also equal access to the media.

When children of different races, religions, and ethnicities are allowed to study together in the same classrooms and to play together in the same schoolyards, they will learn to see their commonalities, even value their diversity, and successfully deal with that diversity.

Let those of us in the governments leave OSCE to do the work that has been identified in this conference to move forward. Member nations should pull OSCE, rather than OSCE having to pull them. Let us spread out. Let us spread the word, not just talk to each other, but teach those who are most in need.

Thank you, Madam Moderator.