



OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF MISSION

Press and Public Information Unit

**Address by Ambassador Hans Ola Urstad, Head of the OSCE Mission to Serbia
at the ceremony commemorating the International Day against Fascism, Anti-
Semitism and Xenophobia, Novi Sad, 9 November 2007**

- Speaker Mr. Kostres, representatives of the Vojvodina National Assembly and Vojvodina executive council, distinguished members of the academia, NGOs and national minority councils.
- First, let me thank the organizers of this event for putting focus and public attention to issues of fascism, anti-Semitism, and xenophobia.
- The democratic community of nations has repeatedly expressed its determination to combat anti-Semitism and xenophobia in public life.
- The OSCE is committed to combating such crimes. As of June 2007, a total of 48 separate commitments had been made by OSCE participating states in reference to fighting anti-Semitism.
- In the framework of the OSCE institutions and conferences, a working definition of anti-Semitism was developed, which many governments and NGOs are using in defining and addressing this sad phenomenon.
- An international conference was held in June this year in Bucharest, addressing the issues of xenophobia and anti-Semitism. It was clearly stated there, that anti-Semitism needs to be condemned without reservation, and close attention was paid to new forms and manifestations of both anti-Semitism and xenophobia.
- The representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Anti-Semitism, Professor Gerf Weisskirchen, rightly pointed out that the parliaments as institutions and people's elected representatives personally have an essential role to play in increasing public awareness regarding anti-Semitism and xenophobia, and in combating these vices.
- There still are, across Europe, very serious and alarming cases of physical assaults on Jews, or representatives of other minorities. It is of the utmost importance that such crimes are immediately and properly addressed by the law enforcement agencies.

- But even more frequent is the tolerance towards anti-Semitic and xenophobic discourse in public and political life, towards the hate crimes. It should be our primary responsibility to identify them, attract close public attention to them and make sure such tendencies are nipped in the bud.
- In Serbia, violent attacks against Jews or other minorities are rare, which is to be welcomed.
- However, anti-Semitic and xenophobic discourse, hate speech exists, and it is not explicitly condemned. Often, it is often considered as a marginal phenomenon that can be tolerated by the society. This is contrary to the commitments that Serbia has taken towards the OSCE and the UN.
- Existence of freely available anti-Semitic literature in mainstream bookstores is one of the symptoms of the problem.
- Serbian society, media and NGOs should not take the incidents lightly.
- There is a need for improved education, for public debate and improved action of the legislatures and politicians to clearly and without reservation condemn each and every of such incidents, and make sure the hate speech is banished from the public space.
- The task is challenging, but there are many best international practices you can access through our Mission, the OSCE as an institution, through our specialized human rights watchdog – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), through Chairman-in-Offices representative, through the Council of Europe and UN.
- We also stand ready to assist the Vojvodina National Assembly, as well as the National Assembly of Serbia to learn about the ways such issues were tackled abroad. There is a wealth of experience, especially related to anti-Semitic incidents, desecration of monuments, use of fascist symbols and the like.
- I want to commend your effort to gather here today to discuss this vital issue not only for Serbia as a state, but also for far reaching democratization of Serbian society, creation of the civil values and the respect to people's identities, opinions and cultural heritage.
- Thank you, and wish you a productive discussion.