



United States Mission to the OSCE
**Reply to the Russian Federation regarding
Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
in the U.S.**

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 17, 2015

I would like to thank the distinguished Russian ambassador for raising the need to address racism, intolerance, and violence in the United States. I assume, of course, that his statement reflects the Russian government's genuine concern about human rights in the United States.

And before I reply to the substance, let me take this opportunity to renew our appreciation for the legitimacy of any state's raising concerns about the implementation of our human rights commitments in other participating States – which the Russian Federation has just demonstrated – as well as for the way in which the Russian delegation has once again made use of the free and open media environment in the United States in order to gather a number of allegations or pieces of information, as well as publically provided information, and made use of the vibrant debate among our civil society activists, with whom the government engages frequently at many levels.

In April, following the tragic death of Freddie Gray after an encounter with Baltimore police, President Obama commented, and I'd like to quote him.

He said: "I think we, as a country, have to do some soul searching. This is not new. It's been going on for decades.

And without making any excuses for criminal activities that take place in these communities, what we also know is that if you have impoverished communities that have been stripped away of opportunity, where children are born into abject poverty; [...] in those environments, if we think that we're just going to send the police to do the dirty work of containing the problems that arise there without as a nation and as a society saying what can we do to change those communities, to help lift up those communities and give those kids opportunity, then we're not going to solve this problem."

As subsequent in New York, Chicago, and elsewhere have demonstrated – and I'll talk more about Chicago later today – the President's observations on the situation and what's need to address it remain valid.

I've explained on several occasions the steps the U.S. government is taking to address specific allegations of police misconduct and the broader issue of policing in the United States, and will report again to the Permanent Council on these topics as additional information becomes available.

Regarding the distinguished Russian ambassador's expression of concern regarding intolerance toward and discrimination of Muslims in the United States, we take this issue very seriously. As President Obama unequivocally stated:

“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.”

In an effort to address this issue within the context of the OSCE, this year the United States brought to Vienna its National Point of Contact on Hate Crimes, from the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Department of Justice, to discuss U.S. efforts to combat hate crimes, exchange best practices, and learn from colleagues facing similar challenges. We likewise cohosted with Turkey an event at the HDIM that focused on promoting tolerance towards Muslims and combating discrimination in the OSCE region. For this event, we invited to HDIM Professor Engy Abdelkader, a Muslim-American woman, and a member of the ODIHR Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion or Belief, who spoke frankly and openly about intolerance and of discrimination toward Muslims in the United States, and efforts to address intolerance and combat discrimination.

Finally, on the issue of Syrian refugees, the United States remains both the largest humanitarian donor and the largest resettlement country for refugees from around the world, and one deeply committed to assisting the Syrian people. In fiscal year 2015, the United States admitted 1700 Syrian refugees; the President has said we will admit at least 10,000 Syrian refugees for resettlement in fiscal year 2016, which is included in our overall target of admitting 85,000 refugees from around the world in 2016. (I will reassure my distinguished Russian colleague that refugee processing is a federal responsibility.) We recognize that admitting more Syrian refugees to the United States is only part of the solution, but the President believes this policy decision is consistent with our responsibility to do more.

And before concluding, may I just say that I don't consider it part of a “respectful dialogue” to make a speech about a colleague's country, and then leave before the reply is completed.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.