



United States Mission to the OSCE

**Statement on High-Level Conference on
Tolerance and Discrimination in Astana**

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
July 1, 2010

We would like to thank the Government of Kazakhstan for hosting the High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination in Astana and ODIHR for assisting. We are also grateful that the OSCE Centre was able to facilitate a dialogue between OSCE participating States and Kazakhstani non-governmental representatives on these issues.

The conference was particularly timely since the events in Kyrgyzstan sharply illustrate that we ignore questions on inter-ethnic relations, bias-motivated violence, tolerance and non-discrimination at our own peril.

We welcomed the opportunity of the conference to reiterate our concern that specific laws, such as banning head coverings and other forms of religious attire, as well as the building of mosques and minarets, often constitute restrictions on religious expression, can be discriminatory, and can marginalize members of minority groups.

We also welcomed the opportunity to express our deep concern about the escalation of violent attacks against Romani individuals, sometimes terrorizing whole communities, as well as a recent spike in anti-Semitism.

Mr. Chairman, it is essential that all participating States recommit to combating all forms of intolerance. To this end, we were pleased that so many participating States and NGOs at the conference called for respect for diversity and protection of human rights of all individuals, including lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons. We were therefore surprised - and disappointed - that there was no reference to this issue in the Chairman-in-Office's document called the "Astana Declaration."

We reiterate the conviction of the United States that fundamental freedoms and human rights – particularly freedom of religion, freedom of assembly, freedom of association, and freedom of expression – are essential elements to combat all forms of intolerance, and that these fundamental freedoms are not yet fully respected in the OSCE region. Protecting individual rights and ensuring space for civil society must remain a singular priority for all participating States.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.