
STATEMENT

**OSCE High-level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination
The Honorable Alice Wong, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism
Astana Kazakstan, June 30, 2010
SESSION 7 – Strategies for promoting tolerance and understanding, inter-ethnic
and intercultural dialogue, including its religious dimension, in the OSCE area**

Mr. Chairman,

Canada encourages all participating States to continue to move forward with the implementation of our existing commitments to combat all forms of discrimination, including on the basis of race, religion, and gender. Human rights flourish in free and democratic societies, where the principles of fairness, respect for diversity, pluralism and justice are embedded in the values and actions of the people and in the laws of governments.

In Canada, it is imperative that our efforts to build a stronger, more cohesive nation reflect our society's growing cultural and religious diversity. Canada is at the cutting edge of efforts to promote dialogue among different ethnic, racial and religious groups. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrines the equality of all peoples without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation or mental or physical disability.

To that end, the Government of Canada continues to support a number of initiatives designed to foster an integrated, socially unified society. We have enhanced our Multiculturalism programming to focus on building an integrated society by promoting intercultural and interfaith understanding among groups; we are assisting federal and public institutions to become more responsive to the needs of Canada's heterogeneous population; and we are taking part in international discussions on multiculturalism and diversity.

Our government is also encouraging youth involvement in building tolerance through special outreach around Black History Month and Asian Heritage Month.

The Government of Canada also funds many innovative programs that bring communities together. Examples include: a program that brings police and youth together to build goodwill; a mentorship program between members of the Jewish and Somali communities to help integrate the young Somali community into Canadian society; and a peer leadership and training program to help high school students better understand, identify and respond to discrimination in their school and community environments.

The last year saw the unveiling of the new citizenship study guide – *Discover Canada: The Rights and Responsibilities of Citizenship* which has become one of the Government of Canada's most in-demand publications. The guide includes a stronger, broader focus on Canada's values, history, and symbols, including our core values of freedom, democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. This new guide reflects our Government's unity-in-diversity approach to multiculturalism and our commitment to promoting civic literacy and engagement among newcomers and Canadian citizens alike.

Mr. Chairman,

In 2009, all three OSCE Chair-in-Office Personal Representatives to promote greater tolerance and combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination across the OSCE region made a joint country visit to Canada. The purpose of the visit was to review Canada's policies, legislation, mechanisms, and best practices in promoting tolerance and combating discrimination, and to identify challenges that remain. Their report on this visit was released recently and circulated to OSCE participating States. We urge other OSCE participating States to also accept requests by the Personal Representatives for country visits.

We recommend that OSCE participating States work to engage youth in strategies for combating discrimination, and ensure that their realities are reflected in any approaches undertaken to promote tolerance and understanding and inter-ethnic and intercultural dialogue. We believe that it is important to target youth, as they are the future leaders of the OSCE and will help to ensure more tolerant societies in the years to come.

In closing, we would like to commend the ODIHR for all of its excellent work in promoting tolerance and understanding in our region and we would like to assure participating States of Canada's commitment to furthering progress in this area at the OSCE.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.