

**OSCE HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND
NON-DISCRIMINATION
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Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on
Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

Mr/Ms. Chair
Distinguished participants
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and a pleasure to address such audience. I was appointed to this mandate by the Greek Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE in June 2009. Since then, I have spoken on this specific form of intolerance at various high level events, including the third Congress of leaders of world and traditional religions in Astana, inter-religions and inter-cultural fora in Krakow, Geneva, Warsaw and Vienna. I have also visited USA, Canada, European Union Institutions in Brussels and the Secretariat of Organization of Islamic Conference in Jeddah.

Mandate:

- I see the focus of my mandate in raising awareness on intolerance and discrimination against Muslims as a serious threat to democracy and human rights across the OSCE region.
- Although anti-Muslim prejudices and stereotypes are centuries old, international commitments to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims were adopted recently only.
- In this regard, the OSCE has taken the lead, calling on the participating States to take measures to effectively respond to and prevent hate crimes against Muslims and develop educational policies and programmes to reduce prejudice and stereotypes which may motivate such attacks.
- However, in spite of some tangible progress achieved in countering intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, many participating States of the OSCE still experience mounting waves of anti-Muslim bias and hostility even a decade after the tragedy of 9/11.

Since I have little time, I will focus on three issues that are at the core of the OSCE's mandate: hate crimes against Muslims and the context in which they take place. I will also raise a few points on how to respond and counter intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.

Hate crimes against Muslims

- The heinous murder of Marwa el-Sherbini and numerous other violent attacks against Muslims and their property, including mosques and cemeteries, indicate that anti-Muslim hate crimes constitutes a serious threat to the security of Muslim individuals across the OSCE region.
- However, as ODIHR's annual report on Hate Crimes in the OSCE Region reveals, there is little reliable official or unofficial statistical information on hate crimes motivated by anti-Muslim bias. Only Austria, Canada, Sweden and USA collect and maintain data on specifically anti-Muslim hate crimes at the national level.
- In the absence of data, how can governments devise strategies and policies that address the issue effectively?
- However ODIHR's report shows clearly that many states throughout the region do not implement commitments they have made in relation with data collection.
- Moreover, the recent report of EU Fundamental Rights Agency indicates that most of the victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes do not report to police. According to the report, the main reason for this is lack of trust between Muslims and law enforcement officers.

Hate Crimes in Context: Bias and Stereotypes

- I would like now to draw your attention to an aspect of the problem that is even more complex to grasp: the environment in which crimes motivated by bias take place.
- OSCE participating States have acknowledged the leading role political and community leaders, heads of states should play by defusing tensions between groups, condemning violent manifestations of intolerance against any individual or group.
- While acknowledging the centrality of respecting freedom of expression, OSCE participating States have also stressed the role media can play in combating stereotypes.
- I have to admit that I have seen too little leadership from the political sphere and from the media when Muslims were subject to assaults or Muslim property was desecrated or deteriorated.
- Even worse, I have witnessed that some media and some political parties use anti-Muslim rhetoric with a view to sell more news, to gain more attention or to attract more votes.
- The rhetoric in place goes beyond religious intolerance: Islam is often misrepresented as a political ideology incompatible with the principles of democracy and human rights.



Hate Crimes in Context: Institutional Discrimination

- Finally, I would like to mention an area where governments have to show leadership, namely state policies free of discrimination. Discriminatory practices can help spread bias, and therefore be a fertile ground for hate crimes.
- The enforcement of counter-terrorism policies is the first policy area that deserves our attention. While recognizing the reality of terrorist threats and the

legitimate right of states to ensure security of their citizens, it shall not be forgotten that counter-terrorist measures should be designed and enforced in the framework of human rights protection.

- I am also concerned about legislative initiatives to restrict freedom of manifestation of religion in Europe, namely banning *burqa* in all public places, including in streets, and prohibition of minarets. Because of their discriminatory character such restrictions may constitute a violation of freedom of religion.
- In this regard, I welcome the recent resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), which states that a general ban on veiling of women would constitute discrimination against women “who genuinely and freely desire to do so” and calls on Switzerland to repeal as soon as possible its general ban on the construction of minarets. However, I am disappointed with the use of a misleading terminology, such as “Islamism” in such an important report.

Responses: How can OSCE/ODIHR provide assistance?

- For this purpose, I encourage the participating States to benefit from the experience and assistance of ODIHR in developing educational tools to counter specific forms of intolerance. Country specific resource books on Muslims in the OSCE region and Guidelines for Educators on how and why to counter intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, which are being developed by ODIHR, in partnership with UNESCO and CoE, should be widely used and disseminated.
- I would like to also emphasize that integration policies of States should address the social and economic needs of Muslims in the countries that they are residing. Such policies should promote integration through participation, not assimilation. This will lead to better understanding and better integration, thus to lessening of mutual mistrust.