



United States Mission to the OSCE

Statement on Tolerance

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Carol Fuller
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
February 25, 2010

The Chairmanship has declared tolerance to be one of its Human Dimension priorities this year. We welcome that and take the floor today to consider how the OSCE might lay the foundation for an ambitious, long-term effort to combat intolerance and discrimination across the region.

The United States attaches great importance to the OSCE's work on confronting the roots of intolerance, strengthening respect for individual human rights, and promoting an environment free of persecution or prejudice. We strongly believe that a comprehensive, lasting solution to underlying problems of intolerance cannot stop at fostering inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue. It must also be based on national legal guarantees of equal rights for all citizens, including fundamental freedoms of expression, association and religion, the effective integration of diverse ethnic and religious populations, and the protection of individuals against violent manifestations of intolerance.

Awareness is crucial in creating the momentum for building societies where differences are not only tolerated, but also respected, and ultimately embraced and celebrated. A relevant illustration for our region concerns the Roma, as insufficient teaching about Romani experiences and achievements has hindered a genuine change of attitude towards Roma in many OSCE countries. Through education and government advocacy, we must strive to resist persistent stereotypes and ignorance, which all too often lead to acts of discrimination and violence.

Governments also need to ensure equal access to education, employment, voting and other public services and to promote vigorous enforcement of civil rights laws. In many participating States, equal access to education, civil rights and public services remains problematic. Nor has my own country been immune to this phenomenon, having long struggled to overcome a devastating legacy of unfair treatment toward a number of ethnic and racial groups.

We have repeatedly expressed our concern about a rise in the number of hate crimes in the OSCE area and stressed the value of collecting hate crime statistics and increasing training of law enforcement and judicial officials on hate crime legislation. As a matter of policy, the United States believes that bias or hate crimes pose a significant threat to the full participation of all citizens in a democratic society. By law, we are committed to ensuring the civil rights and human rights of all people and to protecting their safety from violent attacks based on their real or perceived attributes, including race, religion, ethnicity, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, gender, or gender identity.

Civil society plays an important role in the prevention of hate crimes, including in community outreach and education, informing targeted communities of their rights and victim assistance, and civil society must be allowed to do so. While civil society can work to

educate and inform citizens about their rights, only through government action can discrimination and violent acts of intolerance be fully rectified.

Government can and should take an active role in promoting tolerance and respect for diversity. This role is not in tension with the government's role as guarantor of individual rights and freedoms, including freedom of speech. OSCE states differ on the extent to which we permit hate speech in the media, on the internet or in public discourse. In the U.S., NGOs actively counter intolerance and hateful expression. Furthermore, we believe a free media works best to promote respect for diversity, democracy, equality and fundamental freedoms, as it serves as a marketplace where more enlightened ideas can prevail over shortsighted or biased ones.

While we as participating States have repeatedly stated in our common commitments our resolve to combat intolerance, discrimination, and hate crimes, we need to do a better job of putting those words into action. Troubling trends include police raids and arrests for peaceful religious activity; religious groups facing difficulties in registration, governments putting restrictions on places of worship, religious attire, the use of minority languages, or peaceful cultural expression, and actions by political leadership that exploit ethnic tensions or reiterate unhelpful stereotypes.

The U.S. believes that the ODIHR with its excellent programs is the right home within the OSCE for promoting tolerance. We also strongly support the activities of the three Personal Representatives to help spur political will and spread best practices for combating three distinct forms of intolerance in the OSCE. But these efforts must be accompanied by the political will of participating States to implement their commitments.

The establishment of a society void of racism, xenophobia or other forms of intolerance and discrimination must be a goal, however lofty, to which we continue to strive. This process is intrinsically linked to that of the establishment of a nation grounded in the democratic principles of liberty, justice, and freedom. It requires political action, legal developments and social transitions. To paraphrase civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr., we must dream of nations in which our children would be judged not by the color of their skin, or any other physical aspect, but by the content of their character.

In that vein, the United States hopes that the goodwill and interest harnessed by the chairmanship to hold a high level tolerance conference will be a springboard to generate political will and fruitful follow-up for years to come.

Thank you.