

WARSAW, 11 October 2006

OSCE HDIM-WORKING SESSION 14:

**Tolerance and non-discrimination:
Prevention of nationalism and aggressive chauvinism**

STATEMENT BY THE NGO HUMANITARIAN DEFENSE (GREECE)

Migration, minorities and human rights constitute a challenging topic for citizenship education as migrants and migration policies touch all levels of societies in the OSCE area. New transnational perspectives and knowledge on inclusion and exclusion policies and practices are needed in order to strengthen democracy and human rights.

Communities in conflict spaces and friction zones across the world have commonalities and shared experience. Memories and recollections of the past are often contested and the past is painstakingly constituted through the interplay of collective construction, political bargains, reversals, rationalising of refusals to come to terms with it as well as attempts to recognise the past and cope with it. The process of building societies which are not just ethno-culturally heterogeneous but also open to all diverse groups has been contingent to coming to terms with the past. This process increasingly becomes the arena for opening ways to facing current challenges such as migration, borders dissolution and violation of local social and economic balances.

The focus on the political education of the communities' leaders aims to provide them with the knowledge and the space to discuss the conditions and ways of (re)-entering the wider political community from which their communities have been excluded. The aim is to enable leaders to find ways of dealing with both the expectations of their own communities, as well as the expectations of the international community at large, rather than to compare the historical records of different groups which perceive themselves as victims of mass violence, displacement and social injustice. While engaging in the ordering, grouping and negotiating of the past, relationships of participation, exchange, dialogue, disagreement and compromise, possibly trust and respect, will be established.

Rather our digital age creates possibilities for much better and wider communication at a global level, as well as between leaders and those who identify themselves as members of the minorities. New technologies open new avenues for democratization and accountability, be it in election processes, communication and free circulation of information. Thus the challenges of trust building, addressing fears of loss, discussing conflicting narratives, addressing socio-economic challenges, i.e. ownership and access to resources and overcoming religious and ethnic barriers, as set by the OSCE, could be tackled.

Within this framework an example of a concrete project is The Crossing the Dividing Line project, supported by the Greek NGO Humanitarian Defense and funded by Hellenic Aid -- Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the German Marshall Fund Balkan Trust for Democracy and Freedom House Serbia, was organised by NGOs in Belgrade, Prijedor, Prilep and Tetovo, operating in three different states in South East Europe. Crossing the Dividing Line aimed to bring together leading people from transfrontier communities facing problems of ethnic and religious division, and provided them with experience and knowledge, thus empowering them in the process of building their own communities by getting to know each others' perspective and by mobilizing on a common vision for the future.

The role of civil society in post-conflict societies has been a major concern of the work of the OSCE. This project attempted to provide a comparative perspective of the challenges that face ordinary people in peace and tolerance building environments, and to draw attention to a more just inclusion of their needs and interests. An integrated approach is needed, focusing on concrete activities which generate social integration, create local spaces for the communication of difference, address the social and economic needs of the community members, and reconfigure political relations between the grassroots and the local leadership, crossing thus the multiple dividing lines.