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**Intervention at the OSCE Human Dimensional Meeting:
Tolerance and Non-Discrimination – Session 10**
(5 October 2009)
Warsaw, Poland
Final transcript draft

This morning we will be discussing problems of hatred and intolerance against all sorts of people in the OSCE region. Yes, there are certainly groups that suffer more than others. My own organization is deeply concerned about the discrimination against religious people and in a moment I will recount a few of the categories by which people are discriminated according to their religion or belief. But first, I'd like to recall the purpose of this discussion.

The countries in this room have made bold commitments to combat intolerance and to prevent social discrimination.¹ But first and foremost, they have committed to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. As sad as this discussion will be as the following interventions recount abuses and assaults, it is important for us to recall that these freedoms are a good thing, the right to life and conscience and expression and religion and assembly – these are the principles we seek to protect and promote.

Two general points on hate crime legislation:

First, as we continue to debate hate crime legislation and discrimination laws, we must be careful not to write laws that are overbroad or that grant government authorities too much power to intrude into the individual freedoms of their citizens.

Second, laws are not enough. In order to combat entrenched discrimination and hatred, civil society and governments must endeavor to utilize education and public diplomacy more. Indeed, all too often, poorly written laws only exacerbate the problems.

¹ See for example Concluding Document of Vienna – The Third Follow-up Meeting, Vienna, 15 January 1989: the OSCE members have committed to “ensure human rights to everyone within their territory and subject to their jurisdiction, without distinction of any kind such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political, or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.” It continues by stating that states will “ensure that no individual exercising, expressing the intention to exercise or seeking to exercise these rights and freedoms or any member of his family, will as a consequence be discriminated against in any manner.” (OP13)

Now I'd like to take a moment to highlight three areas in which religious people are discriminated against in the OSCE region today:

1. The workplace: Religious people are all too often excluded from employment on the basis of their religion. Sometimes religious people are discriminated according to their attire or appearance, other times they are discriminated because they refuse to participate in actions that are against their conscience. They should be protected from both types of discrimination.
2. The school: Whether they are turned away at the door for wearing a Sikh turban in France or they are not permitted to be trained in religious studies at the Halki Seminary in Turkey or they are denied time to pray in Texas, schools have become hostile places for religious people.
3. The public square. Much of the discrimination that has arisen in the OSCE region in the past 30 years has not been the legally actionable sort but the socially coercive type of discrimination. Christianity and Islam and Judaism and Sikhism and a host of other religions practiced in the OSCE region are not considered valid or appropriate in public. And yet the freedom of conscience and the principles of democracy necessitate the open inclusion of religious ideas in the public square.

Friends, we have a long way to go and the conversation has just begun this morning. But let's not settle for mere tolerance, as tolerance denotes cheap grace and non-discrimination. Rather let us aim for respect, which does not mean agreement or acceptance of beliefs and ideas, but aspires to the recognition of dignity and worth in each of us.