

Muslim Denomination in Bulgaria
(Grand Mufti's Office in the Republic of Bulgaria)

Address: 27, Bratia Miladinovi str., 1301 Sofia/Bulgaria; tel: +359 2 9816001; fax: +359 2 9803058; web: www.genmuftibg.net

2012 OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
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Written statement to *working session 14: Tolerance and non-discrimination:*

Thank you Madam moderator,

Your excellencies

Distinguished guests,

Notwithstanding the progress made since the advent of democracy in Bulgaria 1990, discrimination, ethnic, religious hatred and prejudice against different vulnerable groups persists in the country.

The rise and spread of various nationalistic movements and parties in Bulgaria disturb individual classes and groups of citizens yet threats and hostile attitude are often directed to Turkish-Muslim community in the country as a whole.

To this end political parties and formations are more and threatening as they periodically arrange different types of campaigns, share opinions that impair our dignity and that aim to restrict the religious rights of the Muslims in Bulgaria.

Under the influence of such extreme ideas mosques, sacred places and Muslim schools are offended in different places. It's hammered into citizens' mind that it is quite normal to violate Muslim relics, it is not punishable and there are no consequences for the doers. Our disappointment is enhanced because in most cases the police do not understand us and do not undertake any professional commitments.

Regarding the role of the media in creating public opinion for Muslims, there are media and journalists who actively contribute to the establishment of anti-Islamic and anti-Muslim attitudes. Those are highly discriminatory programs, with a very offensive rhetoric and indefensible coarse language. Allowing such shows on the air has a double negative effect. On one hand, it leads to increased anti-Islamic sentiments in the society. On the other hand, it gives the Muslims a sense of threat, insecurity and social discomfort.

Therefore I ask and appeal to the authorities to start implementing legislative amendments which should not treat attempts and deed of this kind as criminal and vandal acts but as deed threatening ethnic and religious peace in Bulgaria and should be severely and uncompromisingly

punished regardless of the ethnic or religious background of the performer and who they refer to. Intolerant discourse and hate speech can increase the feeling of insecurity among the targeted groups and inflame tensions in the society.

I take this opportunity to thank ODIHR for the organized hate crime training activity in common with Chief Mufti's Office in Bulgaria on September 12, 2012 in Sofia. Training course was very fruitful and timely realized, due to the fact anti-Muslim hate crimes have increased over last years, there is a need for raising awareness of concept of hate crimes. I'd say that our Office attaches great importance to this training course and we would like to continue the training programmes on discrimination, islamophobia and hate crimes, in view of requests by the community. I encourage ODIHR to include also the other groups as Christians, Jews, Roma organizations, disabled people, gender organizations, vulnerable groups.

As well I'd like to refer to that in March 2010, by demand of Chief Mufti's Office in Bulgaria, experts from ODIHR made an assessment visit to Bulgaria. Then we stated our request to participate in the hate crime training courses for NGO's in Bulgaria. As a result now ODIHR is conducting training courses for the Police in Bulgaria. We highly appreciate it. And now I'd like to express our demand for inclusion in Training Against Hate Crimes for Law Enforcement (TAHCLE) process and being part of it.

In conclusion I'd like to touch on the importance of the "Guidelines for the Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims", a common publication of Council of Europe, UNESCO and OSCE. I congratulate ODIHR on publishing these Guidelines and I highly encourage Bulgarian authorities to disseminate the Guidelines and urge Ministry of education and other Pedagogical institutions to use it in their works. Chief Mufti's Office expresses its readiness to co-operate with authorities.

In this context I have some particular recommendations:

Recommendations:

Participating States

- Provide financial support for ODIHR's activities dealing with intolerance and discrimination against Muslims;
- Widely disseminate and use ODIHR's guidelines for educators on countering intolerance and discrimination against Muslims;
- Use ODIHR's experience and expertise in combating anti-Muslim hate crimes by law enforcement officers;
- Take effective measures, including the adoption, in conformity with their constitutional systems and their international obligations, of such laws which can be necessary to provide protection against any acts that constitute incitement to hatred;

- Ensure that public officials at all levels, including ministers, refrain from making statements that incite to violence and discrimination;
- Develop codes of conduct for political representatives in unequivocally and publicly condemning manifestations of hate in public discourse and acts of violence based on bias and refraining from making discriminatory statements;
- Engage in partnerships with private media, including Internet providers, in order to prevent the dissemination of prejudice, stereotypes and hatred;
- Launch public awareness activities disassociating terrorism and violent extremism with Muslims and Islam.

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- Develop analytically rigorous studies on possible relations between hate crimes and manifestations of intolerance and discrimination in public discourse
- Develop, in co-operation with the Representative of Freedom of Media, tools and materials to support the efforts of media professionals in developing and adopting voluntary codes of conduct, self-regulatory mechanisms and other appropriate steps in order to ensure fair portrayal of individuals and groups in societies
- Design guidelines and compile examples of good practices to combat manifestations of Islamophobia in political discourse, including the media and political speech
- Support civil society in monitoring, reporting on and countering discriminatory speech in the media including on the Internet, in particular through monitoring and reporting of Islamophobic speech.

Up-coming Ukrainian OSCE Chairmanship

- Organize an expert meeting to follow up the recommendations came out of the High Level Conference on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in Public Discourse;
- Encourage Personal Representatives on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination to visit major international media institutions to raise awareness of biased portrayal of Muslims;
- Condemn manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in public discourse, through issuing press releases, whenever it is necessary.