



United States Mission to the OSCE

Session IV: Strengthening the Role of the OSCE in Promoting Tolerance through Dialogue and Partnerships

As prepared for delivery by Ambassador Julie Finley
to the OSCE Meeting on Promoting Inter-Cultural, Inter-Religious and
Inter-Ethnic Understanding, Almaty Kazakhstan
June 13, 2006

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.

I would also like to thank this session's introductory speakers for their thoughtful remarks. They made a number of good recommendations that can form a solid basis for strengthening OSCE's work and the work of participating States to promote tolerance and respect for diversity.

In his address to the Helsinki Summit on August 1, 1975, President Gerald Ford declared, "History will judge this Conference not by what we say here today, but by what we do tomorrow—not by the promises we make, but by the promises we keep."

As we reflect on everything we've discussed at this meeting – on all the recommendations for new commitments and activities – we should keep President Ford's admonition in mind. While we can and should continue to consider new commitments for the future, it is essential that we devote time and energy to implementing our existing commitments *now*.

Promoting inter-cultural, inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding is difficult, especially in heterogeneous societies like those in the OSCE region. This is where the OSCE comes in. This organization has an important role to play in assisting States to implement their commitments, as well as in strengthening civil society's capacity to facilitate dialogue and partnerships between citizens and their governments.

The first step in a participating State's efforts to keep this difficult promise is ensuring that laws, regulations, practices, and policies allow for the unhindered enjoyment of fundamental freedoms. These freedoms – of speech, association, assembly, and religion or belief – belong to all human beings equally, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, sex, or any other factor.

It is therefore vitally important that States have laws ensuring not just tolerance, but *equality* for all citizens before the law, and policies that facilitate equal opportunities for all citizens.

Over the past two years in the OSCE, when we have talked about legislation on tolerance, we have tended to focus on laws dealing with hate crimes. The ODIHR has also done a fantastic job of training police officers to respond to and prevent hate crimes. The U.S. supports the expansion of this program and we would like to see it funded by the core budget, rather than through extra-budgetary contributions.

However, in our focus on hate crimes, we should also keep in mind what we observed in the 2002 Porto Tolerance decision: discrimination and inequalities are themselves the basis for hate speech and violent hate crimes. So to truly combat those crimes, we must strive to eliminate the inequality that fuels them.

Therefore, the United States would strongly support the strengthening of ODIHR's capacity for reviewing draft legislation and assisting participating States in ensuring that national laws treat all citizens equally. We encourage participating States to pass anti-discrimination laws, and to seek the assistance of the legal advisor in the ODIHR Tolerance Program, the Panel of Experts on Legislation Pertaining Freedom of Religion or Belief, or the ODIHR's Rule of Law unit in doing so.

The ODIHR Tolerance Program already has a number of successful projects on education for Holocaust Remembrance and to combat anti-Semitism. Those programs should be expanded, and ODIHR should follow them up with programs on education to combat intolerance against Muslims and programs to teach respect for diversity in all its forms. Education should not overlook internal diversity within ethnic and religious groups, and should aim to stimulate *intra*-group dialogue as well as dialogue among different groups.

Educational programs will be most successful in schools that themselves reflect diversity in society. Indeed the most fundamental starting point in any government's efforts to promote tolerance is desegregation – where necessary – of public schools.

There are a number of excellent non-governmental projects for desegregation of Roma education, for example, in the OSCE region. But non-governmental projects are not enough. Governments need to take the lead and show their citizens that they believe in the benefits of tolerance and respect for diversity. ODIHR and the High Commissioner on National Minorities should provide assistance and training to governments and schools wishing to integrate students from minority communities.

Not only the student body, but also the curricula of public schools should reflect diversity. This means teaching history in as objective a way as possible, highlighting the positive contributions of all groups in society and never perpetuating negative stereotypes of particular groups. ODIHR's Tolerance Program should consider working with educators to encourage the development of appropriate curricula.

ODIHR is already doing an excellent job of helping build civil society's capacity to teach tolerance and respect for diversity through extra-curricular programs. I would suggest that the OSCE could go a step further, perhaps as part of our contribution to the Alliance of Civilizations initiative, in encouraging inter-cultural and inter-faith partnerships in areas such as environmental protection and sustainable rural development, or combating trafficking in human beings or drug use.

Finally, I would like to respond to the many recommendations we have heard so far regarding intolerant expression in the media. It is important that we not lose sight of the fundamental importance of the human right to freedom of expression.

Governments need to combat the attitudes that lead people to publish expressions of intolerance, and they can do this by ensuring equality and sending a strong message that intolerance is wrong. However, there are important reasons to avoid censoring the media,

even when the media print expressions of intolerance. In any case, if citizens are taught to embrace tolerance and diversity, they will reject intolerant speech when they come across it in the media or elsewhere.

At the same time, I agree with those who have said that the OSCE could expand its role in training the region's media to make reporters more aware of biases and stereotypes, as well as to teach them about the diversity within different ethnic and religious groups. I would support programs under the Representative on Freedom of the Media to sensitize journalists and to improve the quality of reporting on ethnic and religious topics.

Thank you, Mr. Moderator.