

Canadian Delegation to the
Organization for Security & Cooperation
in Europe



Délégation du Canada auprès de
l'Organisation pour la sécurité et la coopération
en Europe

**Delegation of Canada to the OSCE
Opening statement at the OSCE High Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination**

Opening Plenary Session - Combating intolerance and discrimination in the OSCE Area - Implementation of relevant OSCE commitments

21st May 2013, Tirana, Albania

Mister Chairperson,

First, we would like to express our sincere thanks to all those involved in planning this event and to all who will participate in our discussions over the next two days.

For Canada, enhancing human dignity in all corners of the OSCE region - regardless of race, belief, gender or sexuality - should remain our collective goal, and Canada will speak up to oppose hatred and ensure that the rights and fundamental freedoms of all are protected and promoted. We are particularly concerned with attacks on basic rights, acts of physical violence and efforts by some to criminalize certain segments of the population. This work must be carried out at all levels, from high profile events such as this one and the annual OSCE Ministerial Council, where we reaffirm our objectives and commitments, to direct outreach to citizens by our governments and our OSCE institutions, where we implement concrete policies and programs.

Like other OSCE participating States, Canadian society continues to evolve and be enriched by ever increasing cultural and religious diversity. To that end, our government continues its efforts to foster a pluralist and inclusive society by helping individuals and communities overcome barriers through equitable participation programs, supporting intercultural and interfaith dialogue and, assisting federal and public institutions to become more responsive to the needs of Canada's heterogeneous population.

Looking at the regional and international level, Canada remains deeply concerned about what appears to be growing incidents of anti-Semitism and New anti-Semitism, attacks against Christians and other incidents of discrimination based on religious belief. While respective OSCE participating States may struggle with some forms of intolerance more than others, it is vital that we send a strong, united message that SUCH HUMAN RIGHTS ABUSES must all be equally condemned. We look forward to this afternoon's three dedicated sessions on combating these forms of intolerance and discrimination.

This year Canada plays a particular role in combating anti-Semitism as we hold the 2013 Chairmanship of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA), and we are pleased that the Chair, Dr. Mario Silva, will be a keynote speaker for Session 3 on Combating Anti-Semitism.

On February 19, 2013, the Government of Canada created the Office of Religious Freedom. Its mandate is to protect and advocate on behalf of religious communities under threat, oppose religious hatred and intolerance and, to promote Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance abroad. As was recently stated by our Ambassador for Religious Freedom, Dr. Andrew Bennett, we believe -and research shows- that when religious freedom, pluralism, peace and security are fostered, the soil is fertile for the growth of strong democratic institutions and long-term prosperity. Individuals who are free to practice their faith in safety and security are also free to contribute to the economic, cultural and political developments of their nation, for the benefit of all.

Canada's approach to religious freedom is anchored in our broader efforts on the promotion of democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law. This is why we believe that our OSCE agenda must continue to adopt a comprehensive approach in implementing our joint commitments on tolerance and non-discrimination.

Hate crime is a particularly insidious form of intolerance that can equally affect individual citizens, our societies and, if unchecked, our broader regional security. Canada takes the issue of hate crime very seriously and we work at home and abroad to fight it. Tomorrow's discussions should allow us to discuss the challenges we face, but also the tools we have at our disposal to address these challenges, such as enhanced data collection, well-trained law enforcement officials and appropriate legal frameworks.

Mister Chairperson,

Through the OSCE and other international and regional mechanisms, Canada will continue to engage actively in discussions on promoting and protecting basic rights, pluralism and diversity. We look forward to our discussions today and to making progress on our OSCE agenda to work with all participating States as we build democratic, open, prosperous and pluralist societies.

Thank you.