



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Marrakesh Declaration and Freedom of Religion or Belief

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
March 3, 2016

In January, over 300 Islamic scholars, interfaith leaders, and international observers from over 120 countries gathered in Marrakesh, Morocco. Religious leaders from several OSCE participating States attended, including from the United States, seeking to establish a declaration by Muslim scholars and intellectuals affirming the human rights and fundamental freedoms of members of religious minorities as equal citizens in Muslim-majority countries. The outcome was the Marrakesh Declaration, a consensus document among the participating scholars and intellectuals that provides a powerful tool from within the Islamic tradition for promoting respect for religious freedom.

By its terms, the declaration provides a framework, based on Islamic texts and the historical example of the Charter of Medina established 1,400 years ago by the Prophet Muhammad, for constitutional, citizenship-based societies that respect the rights, including religious liberty, of all. The declaration explicitly affirms that the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are consistent with this framework.

The core message of the Marrakesh Declaration echoes what this body declared in 1975 in Helsinki, that “participating States will recognize and respect the freedom of the individual to profess and practice, alone or in community with others, religion or belief acting in accordance with the dictates of his own conscience.”

Just as President Obama highlighted the importance of this initiative when he visited an American mosque on February 3, we encourage all OSCE participating States to take note of the Marrakesh Declaration as another key document examining an individual’s right to freedom of belief and a state’s duty to uphold and protect that right. We also encourage ODIHR and OSCE field missions to consider the Marrakesh Declaration in this regard, including in OSCE participating States or when engaging Mediterranean partners.

The United States looks forward to additional efforts by the OSCE to promote respect for the right to freedom of religion or belief. We likewise welcome the OSCE’s focus on combatting discrimination against Muslims and Christians, and combatting anti-Semitism, as these topics are intertwined. We therefore welcome the Chairmanship’s recent appointments of Professor Bülent Şenay as Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, and Professor Vladislav Grib as Personal Representative on Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also Focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions, as well as the reappointment of Rabbi

Andrew Baker as Personal Representative on Combating Anti-Semitism. We strongly support the work of these three personal representatives of the Chair, which they should carry out jointly as well as independently depending on the circumstances. Being able to work in tandem as well as independently can help prevent delays in issuing reports on the personal representatives' country visits, which are needed at a time when this Organization is addressing the rise in discriminations against Muslims, discrimination against Christians, anti-Semitism, and intolerance more broadly, which is unfortunately occurring throughout the OSCE region and beyond. We therefore look forward to the release of the reports already written individually by the Chair's personal representatives.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.