



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Chairmanship-in-Office's Three Personal Representatives for Tolerance

As delivered by Ambassador Daniel B. Baer
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 11, 2014

The United States welcomes to the Permanent Council the Chairmanship's Personal Representatives for Tolerance: Professor Talip Küçükcan, Ambassador Alexey Avtonomov, and Rabbi Andrew Baker. As we approach the end of the Swiss Chairmanship, and look forward to the Serbian Chairmanship, it is timely to reflect on our tolerance-related work and look forward to what can be done next year. We are pleased that all three of you will continue your expert efforts, individually and as a team, in 2015.

We welcome the Basel Declaration on Enhancing Efforts to Combat Anti-Semitism and thank Rabbi Baker for his commitment to organizing the Conference on the 10th Anniversary of the Berlin Declaration. This conference, and the list of recommendations created through the robust participation of civil society, provided a solid foundation for the well-focused, practical declaration agreed upon in Basel aimed at improving the implementation of the Berlin Declaration and other OSCE commitments. We welcome further work that combats intolerance against members of all religions, as well as efforts against racism and xenophobia.

We are pleased to note that you conducted your first visits as a trio to your home countries – the United States, Turkey, and Russia – as well as to Denmark. We look forward to reading your reports on all of these visits.

For our part, this week we saw an advance draft of your report from your July 21-23 visit to the United States. The United States welcomed your visit. We thank you for the report, which raises issues of discrimination, religious intolerance, hate crimes, and racism in the United States. As you know from U.S. statements in the Permanent Council and in the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meetings, as well as statements to our nation by President Obama on these subjects, my government takes these problems of discrimination, intolerance, hate crimes and racism seriously. We as a nation wrestle with them and so do our very engaged citizens and our media. We look forward to seeing your final report published.

While all of you focus primarily on religious tolerance, we welcome your focus on broader tolerance issues as well. As an organization, the OSCE must remain seized with addressing the problem of intolerance in all of its forms. We recognize that intolerance, unchecked, can lead to violence within communities and to conflict within and among States. We also welcome the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities in this regard. We note the work of ODIHR's Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department to address

discrimination in the OSCE area, including its leadership training and its training for law enforcement on hate crimes. We look forward to ODIHR's conference on racism and xenophobia next year, as well as the Representative on Freedom of the Media's event addressing freedom of expression, tolerance, and non-discrimination on December 18.

A brief response, if I may, to Ambassador Avtonomov: though you may have "abused" the translators – and I leave it to them to tell you whether or not they felt exhausted – you haven't "abused" your freedom of speech, or freedom of expression. Not only do international law and universal human rights standards have no room for a concept of abuse of fundamental freedoms – though some repressive regimes like to use that terminology – but actually the support of freedom of expression, of freedom of speech, has been shown empirically to go hand in hand with the enhancement of tolerance. So you should use your freedom of speech as you see fit, as should all of us.

Intolerance is unacceptable and we must continue our efforts to combat all forms of intolerance and discrimination. We thank you for your hard work in 2014 and look forward to even greater achievements in 2015.

Thank you.