



United States Mission to the OSCE

On the Commitments regarding Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: Ensuring Freedom of Religion or Belief

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires Katherine Brucker
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
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Since our founding as a nation, the United States has been committed to the protection of freedom of religion or belief. This principle is a cornerstone of our Constitution. It is also eloquently enshrined in the Helsinki Final Act and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

We stand by the proposition that every individual must be allowed to exercise the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief. This also includes the freedom to change one's religion or belief or not to believe at all. Individuals have the freedom to pursue their belief either individually or in community with others, in public or private, and to manifest those beliefs through worship, observance, practice, and teaching. And it is important that each individual is able to do so without threat or fear of violence.

We cannot take such freedom for granted. Sadly, in recent months there has been a disturbing increase in religiously motivated hate crimes worldwide. Perpetrators have targeted individuals who identify as Muslim, Christian, or Jewish, as well as religious symbols, cemeteries, and monuments. The OSCE's work to combat religious intolerance and discrimination therefore remains crucial. The United States commends the OSCE's three Personal Representatives for Tolerance and Non-Discrimination, Ambassador Evren Dağdelen Akgün, Rabbi Andrew Baker, and Dr. Regina Polak. Their important work is critical to ensuring participating States adhere to their OSCE commitments on freedom of religion or belief.

I want to recognize the role of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights in promoting tolerance and non-discrimination across the OSCE region. ODIHR's recording of hate crimes through data collection, provision of training programs for national authorities, and enhancement of victim support are essential tools to allow all individuals to live freely in accordance with the dictates of one's conscience. We urge all participating States to provide disaggregated hate crimes data to ODIHR.

We laud this work and urge participating States to redouble their efforts to protect and defend the right to freedom of religion or belief and to promote tolerance and nondiscrimination. The United States will continue to do so.

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