



HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

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Enhancing Co-operation between Law Enforcement and Muslim communities

In concert with ODIHR's annual report on hate crimes and ODIHR's workshops for Muslim communities on hate crimes, concerns were repeatedly raised that verbal assaults and threats against imams, physical attacks on Muslim women wearing headscarves and desecration of mosques and other Islamic sites are often not reported to the police, because Muslims believe that their complaints will not be taken seriously or that they will be victimized again. The latest annual report from ODIHR notes that only four States reported hate crimes against Muslims. These include Austria, Serbia, Sweden and the United States, while NGOs reported hate-motivated incidents in 14 countries. However reports from Muslim communities suggest there are a number of unreported incidents throughout the region.

Intolerance against Muslims can also be seen in the numerous instances of anti-Muslim rhetoric by politicians and public figures, postings on the internet and other forms of social media. This nexus of intolerance -- hate on the internet ("Cyberhate) and intolerant discourse -- against Muslims is a burgeoning issue that participating States need to address. Whilst acknowledging the challenge for participating States to ensure the freedom of expression, they also have a duty to promptly renounce hate speech(es) by public officials and ensure robust intervention whenever comments expressed pose a threat to Muslim individuals and communities. The hostile rhetoric stigmatizing Muslims by portraying them as threats to social cohesion, who undermine social and cultural values continues to be prevalent in the OSCE region. Worryingly, despite being victims of hate crimes, many victims do not report these incidents to law enforcement or the authorities for a variety of reasons including a lack of trust in law enforcement and other state agencies. Under-reporting of anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents is prominent and needs to be addressed by authorities.

In order to explore how to build trust and increase reporting of hate crimes by Muslim communities and enhance co-operation between law enforcement and Muslim communities in combating anti-Muslim hate crimes, ODIHR, together with the Swiss Chairmanship, held an expert conference on this issue on 28 April.

The expert conference brought together approximately 90 NGO representatives and government officials from 26 participating States. Some recommendations included suggestions to create sustainable consultation mechanisms between law-enforcement agencies and Muslim organizations in order to exchange information and views on evidence-based,

comprehensive policies, strategies and programmes concerning the security of Muslim communities; to encourage the creation of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, in particular the use of mediators, in building trust between Muslim communities and law-enforcement officers and ensuring the proper training of such people; to support civil society initiatives that seek to monitor and report anti-Muslim hate crimes, provide support for victims, raise awareness of anti-Muslim prejudice, and improve co-operation between public officials in the justice system and Muslim communities.

Hate Crime Workshops for Muslim Community-Based Organizations and Civil Society Organizations Dealing with Intolerance against Muslims

With the aim of enhancing the capacities of civil society to combat hate crimes against Muslims, since 2011, ODIHR has delivered five workshops for non-governmental and community-based organizations. The objectives of these workshops were to provide insight on how to recognize hate crimes; to discuss how civil society organizations can monitor, report and respond to hate crimes against Muslims, based on examples of good practices from across the OSCE region; to present and inform participants about ODIHR's tools dealing with hate crimes and intolerance against Muslims. All workshops were organized in partnership with local non-governmental organizations which had close contacts with community-based organizations. In total, 147 civil society representatives and community leaders attended these workshops.

Empowering Muslim women

Taking into account that women wearing headscarves are one of the most frequent victims of hate crimes, on 13 May 2014, in Warsaw, ODIHR held a focus group meeting on Muslim women. The event brought together 17 Muslim women activists from 13 participating States. They discussed prejudice against Muslim women, their experience of discrimination and hate crime and the activities that Muslim women organizations can conduct in order to raise awareness about gendered aspects of anti-Muslim stereotypes and support gender sensitive tolerance activities. They requested ODIHR's technical assistance and support for the empowerment of Muslim women to report and respond to violent manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslim women.

Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education

ODIHR, in partnership with UNESCO and the Council of Europe, published the "Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims" in October 2011. The Guidelines focus on the characteristics of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in the school context. They provide information on the key methodological principles and approaches which must be taken into account in addressing Islamophobia through education. They offer practical strategies for educators on how to prevent and respond to the manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. This includes, but not limited to, tackling difficult situations, in particular, when a student or a teacher experience

and witness an act of intolerance and discrimination, developing codes of conduct, promoting media literacy and adopting curriculum opt-out policies. The Guidelines have been enriched with examples of good practices from across the region, on-line resources and suggested reading materials.

In partnership with UNESCO and the Council of Europe, ODIHR organized three regional meetings for educational authorities to promote the use of the Guidelines on “Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims through Education for Societies in Transition”; on “Globalization, Diversity and Social Cohesion in Educational Settings” and the third on “Challenging anti-Muslim Prejudice and Promotion of Mutual Understanding in Multicultural Societies through Education.” The objectives of these roundtable meetings were to:

- 1) Raise awareness of educators about the need for challenging anti-Muslim prejudice and provide information on the most effective pedagogical approaches identified in the Guidelines;
- 2) Share examples of good practices and lessons learnt in educational efforts to counter anti-Muslim prejudice;
- 3) Collect recommendations from educators on how to implement the Guidelines in national educational systems of participating States.

The outcome of these meetings was the increased visibility of the Guidelines, which led to the publication of the op-eds in a number of teacher newspapers and educational journals as well as promotion of the Guidelines on the websites of the ministries of education and educational centers. These promotion activities resulted in the establishment of a large network of educators dealing with intolerance against Muslims. Since the beginning of the project, ODIHR reached out approximately to 200 representatives of educational authorities, expert groups and activists dealing with this topic.

However, despite these activities conducted by ODIHR, it is possible to still observe continuing cases of attacks targeting Muslims and their property. Muslims are often portrayed as unable to integrate and Islam as incompatible with contemporary values. Discussion on the religious dress of Muslim women, ritual slaughter of animals or male circumcision seems to contribute to a perception that there is no place for Islam despite the fact that the OSCE region has been diverse and an example of peaceful coexistence for centuries. It is therefore necessary to continue our efforts and invest more to counter intolerance against Muslims.