

United States Mission to the OSCE

Session 8: Tolerance and Non-Discrimination II

*Prevention and response to hate crimes, promotion of gender balance,
combating intolerance and discrimination*

Delivered by Ambassador Michael Guest

Speaking Notes

Moderator,

My delegation has circulated the text of my prepared remarks. But I've put those remarks aside, and ask for your permission to speak to you from the heart.

I don't know whether any of my colleagues at this table have personally been victim to a violent hate crime. I have – for the simple reason that I am gay. That experience has shaped the way I see the issues we discuss this afternoon.

As diplomats we tend to talk about issues like intolerance and discrimination from some faraway place, referring to “policy,” or perhaps to some lofty “principle.” But the experiences we have heard from NGO representatives here bring us back to sometimes uncomfortable realities. Hate crimes, discrimination and gender inequality affect real people, real lives. And so the starting point of our conversation must be that we are all people – human beings, you and I. And if government exists to protect citizens, and to promote our common well-being, how would you expect it to respond if you were attacked, or discriminated against in some tangible way – all for something that's such a basic part of who you are?

Last weekend, the U.S. delegation visited Auschwitz, a stark and extreme reminder that bigotry and bias are not new. Governments cannot change the past, of course. But we cannot allow it to repeat. And the steps we take now can positively shape the future.

Leaders must speak out when anti-Muslim sentiment, or anti-Semitic acts, occur. Where the majority is white, people of different color or race or ethnicity deserve our respect and equal treatment, both under the law and on the street. Where women are treated unequally, there must be remedy. And regardless of public sentiment, or maybe even your own personal views, gays and Roma are entitled to the same protections in law as anyone else – whether in street parades, or access to services, or in exercising any of the rights we're discussing here in Warsaw.

These issues are personal to me, and painful to so many. They are also important to my country, and to each of us here. I am proud that we are again struggling, at home, to address questions of fairness in American life. Some of you are too. As head of delegation, I underscore our support for ODIHR's work in this field, and reiterate our call for a special OSCE session on racism and discrimination to be held in 2011. But as a colleague and fellow human being, I plead with you to recognize that the responsibility for combating hate and inequality begins not with the OSCE but in our capitals, and in our countries. Our NGO friends achingly remind us that we can do more. I beg you to allow your hearts to accept their challenge.

Thank you.