



Roundtable Meeting:

Challenging anti-Muslim Prejudice and Promotion of Mutual Understanding in Multicultural Societies through Education

ANNOTATED AGENDA

International human rights instruments acknowledge education not only as a right, but also as a means to promote mutual understanding and respect. They underline that education can play a central role in fostering a culture of peace with and between countries, by advancing the understanding of different cultures. For this reason, States have committed to develop and implement comprehensive educational strategies and programmes to combat racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance.¹ Accordingly, educational authorities in many countries have taken initiatives to challenge prejudice and teach about mutual respect and tolerance in schools.

However, the challenge posed by intolerance and discrimination is constantly shifting as societies change. Therefore, the efforts of States to counter prejudice and promote mutual understanding through education require constant evaluation of these activities and their adjustment. Manifestations of anti-Muslim sentiments in recent years are one of the examples of this situation. While, as a result of international tensions, migration flows and economic trends, intolerance and discrimination against Muslims evolve and gain a new momentum, educators need to enhance their understanding of intolerance against Muslims and their skills to challenge this phenomenon.

With the view of supporting educators in countering these challenges, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the Council of Europe and UNESCO have co-published *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance against Muslims: Addressing Islamophobia through Education*. This unique publication aims to assist educators in identifying and responding to the manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in schools. It provides practical information on rights-based, participatory approaches, the importance of opening spaces for discussion,

¹ See, OSCE Ministerial Council Decision No. 13/06 on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding, 30 November 2007 (M.C. Dec/13/07); UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (Paris, 14 December 1960); UNESCO Recommendation concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Freedoms (Paris, 19 November 1974); Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education, CM/Rec (2010) 7.

accommodation of religious diversity as well as teaching about history, religions and cultures. The Guidelines also present examples of good practices from a range of different countries. As educational environments may vary from one country to another, educational strategies and approaches proposed in the Guidelines should be considered in the light of specific contexts which are applicable.

The meeting is the third regional event which aims to promote the Guidelines and raise awareness of the role of education to counter intolerance and discrimination against Muslims through education.² Following the previous meetings hosted by ODIHR and UNESCO, respectively, it will be hosted by the Council of Europe. The meeting will seek to provide a forum for educational authorities to discuss how the Guidelines can be used in different educational settings and which complementary activities and tools need to be developed for this purpose. The discussions will focus on the following themes:

- The role of education in promoting mutual understanding and respect in multicultural societies;
- Sharing experiences and lessons learned; and
- Next steps to put in practice the Guidelines.

During the meeting English and Russian simultaneous translation will be provided.

A report of the meeting will be issued highlighting recommendations on how to implement the Guidelines.

² The previous regional roundtable meetings are the following:

- “Countering Intolerance against Muslims through Education for Societies in Transition”, Vienna, 6 September 2012. The summary report is available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/100237>.
- “Globalization, Diversity and Social Cohesion in Educational Settings”, Paris, France, 5 November 2012. The summary report is available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr/100238>.

Agenda

Date: 5 July 2013

Venue: Room 11, Palace of Europe, Council of Europe, Strasbourg

10:00 - 11:00 Opening Remarks

11:00 –11:30 Coffee Break

11:30 – 13:00 The Role of Education in Promoting Mutual Understanding and Respect in Multicultural Societies

Education is crucial in all societies as it provides opportunities for individuals to achieve their full capacities. In today's multicultural societies, it is becoming even more important because education is also a means to promote equality, social cohesion and participation in political, social and economic life of the society. As such, teachers can play an essential role in broadening understanding of human rights, breaking down stereotypes, increasing appreciation of diversity as a value. In the countries where diverse populations cohabit, teachers can transfer to new generations the knowledge about the experience of living together in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies. They can promote an appreciation of positive interactions among different communities and their contributions to the society. This aspect of education has been recognized by a number of international commitments on combating intolerance and discrimination. The recently published Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance against Muslims present a new contribution to the efforts made by the international community and it is important to examine how they can assist educators in promoting mutual understanding and respect in multicultural societies.

13:00 – 14:30 Lunch

14:30 – 16.00 Sharing Experiences: Approaches to Challenging anti-Muslim Prejudice through Education

In recent years various countries have taken educational initiatives to promote mutual understanding and respect. Nonetheless, Muslim communities continue experiencing the acts of discrimination and intolerance in different spheres of social life, including education. In many countries, intercultural competences of teachers need to be enhanced, by equipping them with necessary skills to identify and counter manifestations of intolerance against Muslims in schools. A rights-based approach must be an integral part of any teacher training activity in the field of tolerance education. Such initiatives would also require the development of adequate teaching materials on challenging anti-

Muslim stereotypes and the revision of textbooks, including those teaching about religions, cultures and histories, in order to ensure that they are free from bias. All these cannot be achieved without sensitizing school administrators about the impact of discriminatory school policies and practices on students. The aim of this session is to discuss what lessons learned from the existing initiatives to promote tolerance and challenge anti-Muslim prejudice through education and how they could be further improved.

16:00 –16:30 Coffee Break

16:30 – 17:30 Implementation of the Guidelines – Next Steps

The Guidelines can support the educational efforts of participating States by helping teachers understand how intolerance and discrimination against Muslims can be manifested in schools. This document can generate new ideas for various classroom activities to encourage critical thinking and an appreciation of diversity as a value. It can be also used in curriculum planning and development as well as in pre-service and in-service training of teachers. This session will provide an opportunity to review the recommendations of the previous roundtable meetings and further discuss what educational policies and strategies should be in place in order to promote the use of the Guidelines in multicultural societies.

17:30 – 18:00 Concluding Remarks