

**Closing Remarks by
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Austrian OSCE Chairmanship**

Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting

**Freedom of Religion or Belief:
Issues, Opportunities, and the specific Challenges of Combating
Anti-Semitism and Intolerance and Discrimination against
Christians, Muslims and Members of other Religions**

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Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank you all for coming to the first Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting under the Austrian Chairmanship and for your active participation and constructive exchange of views.

Over the last two days we have heard from our introducers and from all of you about the many challenges we still face across the OSCE region in the area of freedom of religion or belief and on the specific challenges of combatting anti-Semitism and intolerance and discrimination against Christians, Muslims, and members of other religions.

We have also heard a number of concrete recommendations focused on strengthening these rights and ways to ensure a better implementation of our existing OSCE commitments.

Despite many challenges and different views expressed during the discussions, this Meeting has been an extremely valuable opportunity for all of our participating States to remind ourselves of the several OSCE commitments on Freedom of Religion or Belief as well as on Tolerance and Non-discrimination, as well as the pressing need for us to think creatively about ways to meaningfully respect and translate these commitments into action, respecting, in particular, the universality of the right to freedom of religion or belief.

As was also stated in our opening remarks, the promotion and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of religion or belief, on a national level as well as internationally, plays an important role for Austria. There is a clear understanding that special attention must be given to the fight against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and related intolerance, and Austria remains fully committed to this fight.

Despite having a strong legal system in place, which enables authorities and courts to combat right-wing extremism, xenophobic, anti-Semitic and racist acts; we are also aware that racist prejudices, attitudes, and acts still exist, and that sustainable and differentiated policies are necessary in order to counteract these phenomena in the long-term.

Part of the role of any Chairmanship is to bear higher levels of scrutiny, and to lead by example. Therefore, and like previous OSCE Chairmanships, Austria has taken this opportunity to commit to a voluntary self-evaluation of its implementation of the OSCE human dimension commitments, including in the area of "hate crimes, religious tolerance, and extremism". We look forward to the conclusions and recommendations of this evaluation which will be thoroughly assessed and feed onto our future activities.

I also take this opportunity to thank the many civil society organisations, including those that have taken the floor today, for their input in this process. Your input and the data being collected are important to drive policies in this regard and strengthen efforts already under way, such as training of security forces.

Once again, a big thank you to all speakers and participants for the concrete recommendations and practical proposals focused at strengthening the right to freedom of religion or belief across the whole OSCE region. And thank you also to our moderators for summarising the conclusions of this Meeting.

Our intention is to follow-up on these outcomes and builds on them in our future work on these issues.

I want to underline that this is a joint effort.

We as the Chairmanship are fully committed to enhancing our continued dialogue on these issues. As such, we will do our part in providing such platforms for all participating States, at the same time we encourage all 57 participating States to work together towards a deepened understanding of each other's perspectives and our common shared values.

Finally, I would like to thank ODIHR, and their outstanding team for making this Meeting a success. And for their tireless efforts in assisting us all (the participating States) with upholding our commitments on freedom of religion or belief, tolerance and non-discrimination, and dialogue.

Thank you also to the interpreters, who have ensured our dialogue *sans linguistique frontiers* over the last two days.