

Steps taken by Austria to combat intolerance, negative stereotyping stigmatization, discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against persons based on religion or belief

Austria thanks the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the offer to provide contributions to the follow-up report requested in General Assembly Resolution A/RES/71/195 entitled „Combating intolerance, negative stereotyping and stigmatization of, and discrimination, incitement to violence and violence against, persons based on religion and belief“ and is pleased to provide the following input.

Austria has been active in combating intolerance based on religion or belief within the framework of the **OSCE**. In 2016, Austrian contributions helped finance a general project within the ODIHR program on freedom of religion or belief, as well as a project with a more specific focus: the representation of Muslims in the media. Austrian Representatives also participated in a number of events related to the topic such as a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting on “Policies and Strategies to Further Promote Tolerance and Non-Discrimination” and a conference on Tolerance and Diversity, both organised by the German Chairmanship of the OSCE. The Austrian Chairmanship of the OSCE Mediterranean Partners Group also held a session on “The role of religion and dialogue in preventing violent extremism” with participants from Al Azhar University (Cairo), the Algerian Ministry for Religious Affairs and representatives of the Austrian Muslim Faith Community.

In 2017, the **Austrian Chairmanship of the OSCE** made combating intolerance and discrimination, including based on religion or belief, a priority. In this regard, Austria has continued to support several projects such as the development of an ODIHR toolkit for the security of Jewish communities. Throughout the year, the Austrian Chairmanship is organizing various events on tolerance and non-discrimination to foster tolerance on an international level, including a Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting titled “Freedom of Religion or Belief: Issues, Opportunities, and the Specific Challenges of Combating Anti-Semitism and Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians, Muslims and member of other Religions.” The same topic will also be high on the agenda of the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

Like previous Chairmanships, Austria appointed three **Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office** on Tolerance and non-Discrimination to foster tolerance and dialogue in support of the Chairmanship’s agenda: Rabbi Andrew Baker (Combating anti-Semitism, re-appointed), Prof. Bülent Şenay (Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, re-appointed), and Prof. Ingeborg Gabriel (Combating Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination, also focusing on Intolerance and Discrimination against Christians and Members of Other Religions, newly appointed). The Personal Representatives promote better co-ordination of participating States’ efforts to effectively implement relevant Ministerial and Permanent Council Decisions in the field of tolerance and non-discrimination, conduct country visits (such as a joint visit to Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as Germany in May 2017), and pay special attention to all forms of intolerance and discrimination, including gender aspects.

In its **bilateral relations**, Austria has fostered **interreligious dialogue** for more than three decades by actively engaging academics, experts, and religious leaders. Austria considers such dialogue to be an indispensable instrument to foster respect, cooperation and understanding among peoples and strengthening human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Therefore, contributing to global trust-building and peaceful co-existence through dialogue tools constitutes an essential part of Austrian foreign policy. A Task Force on Dialogue of Cultures and Religions was established within the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs in 2007, charged i.a. with supporting dialogue platforms and interreligious civil society initiatives.

Interreligious dialogue on the national level is fostered by the Platform of Churches and Religious Communities, which was established on the initiative of the Austrian religious communities themselves to discuss issues of common interest and reach agreed opinions. In October 2015, the Platform drafted a joint declaration regarding "Freedom of Religion, the Protection of Religious Minorities, and the Rejection of Violence in the Name of Religion." Austria also hosts the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue in Vienna, an international organisation representing all major world religions, whose mandate is to promote peace and reconciliation through dialogue among religious actors, policy makers and civil society.

On the **national level**, the **dialogue between the government and the legally recognised churches and religious communities in Austria** is well-established and institutionalised, and has given rise, for example, to a right to give opinions on draft laws and regulations, and close cooperation on matters of education or health. The Federal Chancellery is also active in this field, as it hosts a biannual interreligious dialogue to involve the relevant actors in numerous activities within the interreligious and socio-political ambit. In addition, the **State Secretary** organised a round table with members of the civil society in close cooperation with the big religious communities, as well as a **networking and workshop event to support the fight against online hate-speech**. She also endorsed the publication of **guidelines against hate-postings, and the NGO-run platform "CounterACT!"**

In the field of public sector employment, the Federal Government has taken steps to ensure **non-discrimination in its employment policy**, as the Federal Equal Treatment Act **prohibits discrimination, including on the grounds of religion or ethnic origin**. Any cases of discrimination can be dealt with in disciplinary proceedings, as well as proceedings before the Federal Equal Treatment Commission (and its four regional offices).

Finally, in the field of **integration**, the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs, in cooperation with the Austrian Integration Fund, has launched the **campaign "Zusammen:Österreich" ("Together:Austria")** which recruits "Integration Ambassadors" to visit to schools, civil society organisations and workplaces. These persons all of whom immigrated to Austria themselves and built a successful life here, serve as role models, disperse prejudice of autochthonous Austrians, and promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence in a diverse society.