# How can we address hate crimes against Muslims? [1]

25 May 2015

Intolerance against Muslims takes many forms, from denial of service or institutionalized discrimination to violent hate crimes. It is an issue of growing concern across the OSCE region.

How can we address hate crimes against Muslims? [1]

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HATE CRIMES AGAINST INDIVIDUALS:
PHYSICAL ASSAULTS, ATTEMPTS, ETC.

HATE CRIMES AGAINST RELIGIOUS PLACES:
ATTACKS ON MOSQUES, DESECRATION
OF CEMETERIES, ETC.

In a presentation before the OSCE's Human Dimension Committee held on 21 April 2015, Cristina Finch, Head of the Tolerance and Non-Discrimination Department at the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), highlighted the importance and the impact intolerance has on Muslim communities.

"Muslim communities are targeted because of their faith, a fact that is often compounded by ethnicity, gender or immigration status," she said. "Notably, Muslim women are often targets of hostility on multiple grounds, such as gender, ethnicity and religion."

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## How intolerance and hate crimes affect Muslim communities

HATE CRIMES AGAINST INDIVIDUALS: PHYSICAL ASSAULTS, ATTEMPTS, ETC.

DISCRIMINATION IN ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND WORK

SCHOOL

HATE CRIMES AGAINST RELIGIOUS PLACES: ATTACKS ON MOSQUES, DESECRATION OF CEMETERIES, ETC.

HATE SPEECH: INSULTS, HARASSMENT OR INCITEMENT TO HATRED

"For example, ODIHR's latest hate crime data indicate that Muslim women wearing headscarves are disproportionately at risk of assault and harassment. The headscarf is perceived by assailants as the main visible symbol of Muslim women's faith, but those who do not wear it are also affected."
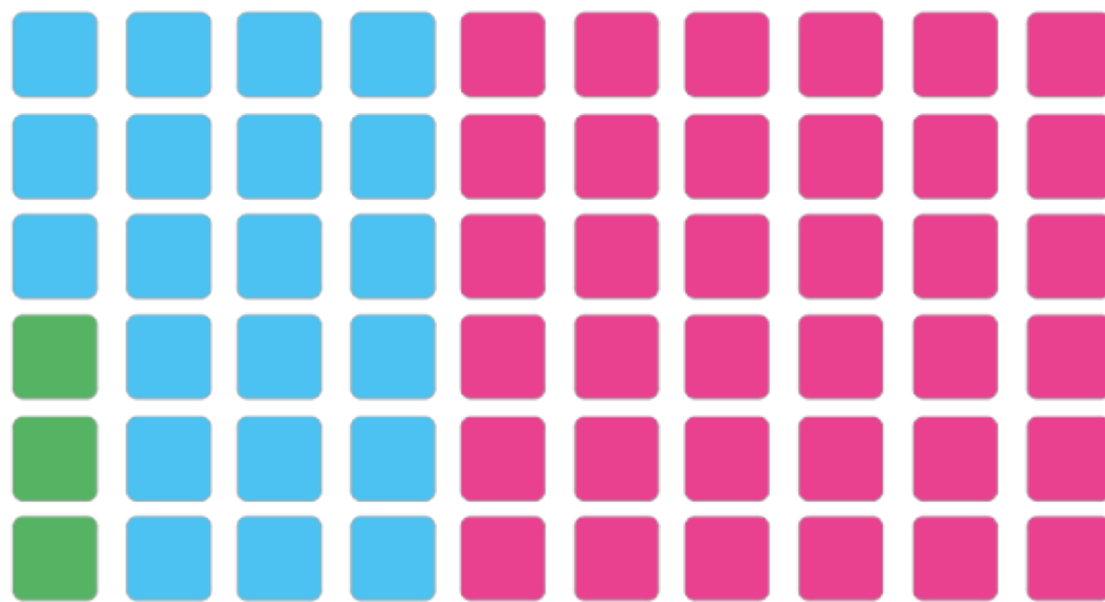
The first step to countering hate crimes against Muslims is to understand their impact and prevalence.

**Why record hate crimes?**

Although it is the government's obligation to end bias-motivated violence against Muslims, civil society, governments and international organizations can all play an effective role in ending this human rights violation. From publicly denouncing intolerance to providing physical security for affected communities, much can be done. But effective efforts to address hate crime must begin with a solid method of recording incidents of hate crime.

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## 2013 data on hate crime against Muslims

**3 PARTICIPATING STATES HAVE CURRENTLY PROVIDED DATA FOR 2013**

**21 PARTICIPATING STATES COVERED BY NGOs in 2013**

**37 PARTICIPATING STATES WHERE NO DATA IS YET AVAILABLE FOR 2013**

OSCE ODIHR
HATE CRIME REPORTING

Data received so far for 2013 include information on hate crimes against Muslims from just three out of the 57 OSCE participating States [2]. By comparison, civil society groups submitted data for 21 different participating States. This is a clear indication that anti-Muslim hate crimes remain significantly under-reported and under-recorded by state authorities.

Reporting is the first step towards achieving justice, and it provides the opportunity for police – and civil society groups involved in victim support – to legally qualify the nature of an incident, to investigate the case, and to provide the most appropriate response. Recording incidents also provides policymakers with data needed to understand the nature and dynamics of hate crime.

Recording hate crimes is an important step in breaking the isolation many communities can feel by showing that governments are committed to understanding and addressing the problem. This is an important step towards addressing the deeper social and psychological consequences of racism and intolerance.

ODIHR organized an expert meeting in April 2014 to discuss the security issues of Muslim communities. The issues of exclusion, low trust in law enforcement, and under-reporting of hate crimes featured prominently in discussions at the event.

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## Factors explaining low recording numbers

LOW TRUST IN LAW ENFORCEMENT AND JUSTICE SYSTEM

LACK OF LEGAL AWARENESS ABOUT HATE CRIMES AND DISCRIMINATION

' IF I REPORT, NOTHING WILL HAPPEN '

MOST VICTIMS DO NOT KNOW WHERE AND HOW THEY CAN FIND HELP

**A victim-centred approach to data collection**

Civil society and the authorities in participating States collect data from across the spectrum of intolerance, including hate crime and discrimination.

Different organizations may have different approaches to recording incidents, as they often have different mandates, aims or objectives. For example, ODIHR reports annually on hate crime incidents. Civil society groups may also focus on issues such as hate speech and discrimination, often capturing incidents that never get reported to the authorities. Further still, police forces may include a wide range of criminal and administrative offences, reflecting only those that are reported to them directly or that reach the threshold of a criminal or administrative offence.

Adopting a holistic approach to data gathering can overcome potential gaps in reporting intolerance against Muslims – indeed, against any group. It is important that police, civil society groups and inter-governmental organizations such as ODIHR work together to create a shared picture of the prevalence and impact of hate crime and, more importantly, what works to support victims and prevent it.

**What can be done**

Addressing intolerance and hate crime against Muslims is no small task. To help end this problem, ODIHR has identified a number of priority areas of work, based on input from our partners:

- **Continuing to empower civil society groups,** through their participation in human dimension events, training and outreach, to report on anti-Muslim hate crime;
- **Increasing the quality and quantity of data on hate crimes targeting Muslims**, by working with participating States and civil society. This will progressively improve data coverage, by addressing the significant under-reporting of anti-Muslim incidents;
- **Working with the media** and civil society to share good practices to promote mutual

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respect and understanding, in order to **address the most common stereotypes against Muslims, and;**

- **Promoting equal access to education and work for Muslim women by providing a platform to share some of the challenges they face and a space to be heard.**

## Our priorities for 2015

WORKING WITH ALL STAKEHOLDERS TO ADDRESS INTOLERANCE AGAINST MUSLIMS

PROMOTING EQUAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION AND WORK FOR MUSLIM WOMEN

INCREASING THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF DATA ON ANTI-MUSLIM INCIDENTS

EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

As part of its efforts to counter all forms of discrimination, ODIHR is organizing a conference in November 2015 for civil society leaders working on the broad range of tolerance and non-discrimination issues. Best practices and approaches to counter hate crime will be at the centre of the discussions.

In her concluding remarks to the Human Dimension Committee, Cristina Finch noted the importance of building coalitions among different sectors of civil society, government and international organizations.

"At a time where communities are facing different forms of racism and intolerance across the OSCE region, our commitment to promoting mutual understanding invites us to bring people together, not divide them."

- Read more about ODIHR's efforts to counter intolerance against Muslims [3].

Bias against Muslims [4]
Working with civil society
Recording hate crimes

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[4] http://hatecrime.osce.org/what-hate-crime/bias-against-muslims

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