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“Addressing Islamophobia”

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Mr. Chairman,
Distinguished Participants,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Practically all serious surveys carried out by well-known world organizations, all the “official” reports by international and multinational institutions and individual scientific studies clearly show that discrimination against Islam and Muslims in almost all walks of life in the West in a well-established fact.

The root cause of this fact is the phenomenon called ‘Islamophobia’ which literally means “fear of Islam and Muslims”. This phenomenon is on the rise, especially in the West and ought to be addressed urgently at domestic and international levels.

The assertion that there are disagreements regarding the legal definition of the term ‘Islamophobia’ does no harm to this urgency. Islamophobia is a form of racism and it must be treated so.

What should be done?

To start with, we all have to be very careful about the *language* we use. Intolerance, discrimination, hatred and the like usually find a cozy home in language. Islamophobic discourse has to be avoided; when and if it occurs, it has to be condemned. *Ignorance* is the second home of Islamophobia. There has to be a *learning and unlearning* process in order to fill the gap created by *knowledge deficit*.

Negative *prejudices* ought to be examined scientifically, rationally and morally. The fragile relations between Muslims and Westerners in some areas should not be further weakened by the unfounded prejudices.

All *integration* strategies and action plans must be formulated and put into practice in light of “*the principle of inclusion with diversity*”. Inclusion ought to take place around *commonly shared values*, especially those on which democratic governance is founded.

As for *diversity*, they have to be *tolerated* as long as they are not used to destroy legal and socio-political regimes based internationally by recognized political values which are clearly related to internationally described and prescribed fundamental human rights. That means Muslims have to have equal opportunity in education, employment, work-life in general, public service, full political participation, etc. Each party, i.e. Muslims and

Westerners have to recognize and respect religious, philosophical and ideological differences and identities on the condition I have just mentioned.

Genuine Islamic *knowledge* must be taught in *schools*. A clear distinction has to be drawn between *fair criticism* of religious understanding and interpretation, and *insulting*, condemning a faith or faith-based organizations, activities, etc. Muslims have to work hard in order to teach, to present, to represent their faith, especially in the Western milieu. They should not leave the space for the ignorant, literalist, essentialist, narrow-minded people to do this work. They have to condemn boldly and loudly all forms of violence and terrorism in particular.

The *security measures* should take note of democratic principles and of the requirements of *sustainable multiculturalism* and co-existence.

Scholarly works dealing with issues at hand ought to be critically examined, especially those written by well-known historians, social scientists, political analysts and so on. In the last ten years or so, some of those works, despite their scientific weakness and theoretical inconsistencies have had negative impacts on some intellectuals, media-people, socio-political analysts and even decision-makers.

Media has a key role to play in addressing Islamophobia. In our time Islam and Muslims have become major topics in practically all Western media which has perhaps the key relevance and to the ways in which people view and understand Islam and Muslims. Freedom of expression and the artistic freedom are the cornerstones in all democratically governed societies. But this principle “does not preclude the protection of people from racist, Islamophobic (or xenophobic) language, behaviors and actions. Regarding this, there seems to be a legal vacuum, especially in the legal systems of some countries. This too ought to be addressed in a democratically acceptable way.