

Statement
by Ambassador at Large of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan
U.Suleimen at the OSCE Conference on Tolerance and Non-
Discrimination, Opening Plenary Session
(May 21-22, Tirana)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Can I start by thanking the Ukrainian chairmanship for the excellent way this conference has been run and to our Albanian hosts for the warm welcome we have all received.

This has been all the more impressive given the limited time to prepare for such an important event.

It is important because the issues we are discussing go to the heart of what the OSCE wants for the citizens of our countries.

This was made clear nearly four decades ago in Helsinki Final Act.

Member states agreed to recognize and respect their citizens' human rights, to protect them against intolerance and discrimination and to foster freedom of religion.

This basic obligation has been rightly built on by a succession of human rights instruments which have received near universal support over the last forty years.

But the number of times that tolerance and non-discrimination has been high on the OSCE agenda shows the problems still to be overcome.

As you may remember, one of the major outcomes of Kazakhstan's OSCE chairmanship was the Astana Declaration in 2010.

In the Declaration, members expressed their collective concern about the worrying rise in intolerance and aggressive nationalism.

The result was an agreement to counter incitements to violence and hatred and step up efforts to promote understanding between those of different ethnic backgrounds, faiths and cultures.

Kazakhstan is very pleased to see Ukraine during its chairmanship building on this work.

Ladies and gentlemen, it should be no surprise that Kazakhstan should take such an active and leading interest in this entire area.

Ever since our independence 21 years ago, diversity and tolerance has been the heart of our national identity.

Our citizens come from many different faiths, ethnic groupings and cultures.

We are immensely proud of both this diversity and our record of harmony and mutual respect.

We believe this is one of the great strengths of our country.

Religious and ethnic tolerance is a founding principle and is enshrined in our constitution.

Diversity is celebrated within the framework of our modern nation's ideals and ambitions.

We have worked hard to create the conditions where believers of all the world's great faiths worship freely and where people of all backgrounds can make their full contribution to our nation's progress.

Every country is, of course, different. Each society must follow its own model. We are also not complacent. Promoting the principles of tolerance and ensuring mutual respect requires constant effort and vigilance.

But we hope that Kazakhstan's success in building a stable and harmonious society can help provide an example of what can be achieved.

We are always happy to share our experiences with our fellow OSCE members.

Ladies and gentlemen, Kazakhstan has worked tirelessly to foster dialogue and understanding not just within our borders country but also internationally.

We see ourselves as a bridge between East and West.

We are proud to have good relations with all our neighbors and be widely recognized as good global citizens.

Across a wide variety of areas, we set out to promote dialogue and find common solutions.

Our country, for example, set up and hosted the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religion.

This provides an opportunity for religious leaders to meet with the aim of building understanding and mutual respect.

But despite the efforts of Kazakhstan and many other countries, we must also recognize that xenophobia, racism and religious extremism are on the rise globally.

These evils are putting in danger not only national but also international stability and security.

Kazakhstan, through the good sense of its people, may be a stable country. But we are located in an unstable region.

Like many nations around the world, we face the threat of extremism and hatred being imported into our country.

Extremism based on a distortion of religion has got a foothold in our region.

It is up to each country to take the necessary steps to protect its citizens against those preaching hatred.

But it is also vital that this is done in a way which protects the right of the overwhelming majority of genuine believers to practice their faith.

The full answer, however, in a world in which ideas and people move easily across borders lies in the international community acting together to promote tolerance and increased understanding.

This is why this conference is so important for our collective security and progress.

In conclusion, I can promise Kazakhstan will continue to give full support for all efforts to tackle intolerance and discrimination.

I hope that this conference will help generate new ideas and initiatives to help achieve this ambition.

I wish all participants fruitful deliberations.