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**- OSCE Conference on anti-Semitism
and on other Forms of Intolerance -**

Cordoba, 8 June 2005

**STATEMENT BY THE PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE
OF THE BELGIAN MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM**

SENATOR PIERRE CHEVALIER

Thank you Mr. Chairman,

Belgium commends the Spanish hosts for providing us with such a symbolically important and beautiful location to reflect on a topic every region in the world is struggling with; the promotion of mutual respect and understanding in culturally diverse societies.

We also commend the Slovenian Chairmanship with its skilful chairmanship to coordinate negotiations on the contents of this Conference. Important negotiations, as the topics involved lie at the very heart of policies within participating States.

For the Belgian Government too, the promotion of mutual respect and understanding and the fight against racism, xenophobia, discrimination and anti-Semitism are priorities in working out its domestic policies.

Allow me two brief examples from a wide range of Belgian policies in this regard:

- Recently a new surge of hate crimes prompted the Belgian Government to adopt a “Federal Action Plan of 10 Points related to racism, xenophobia and discrimination” in July ‘04, which strongly reinforced the Belgian policies regarding the already existing legislation on hate crimes. Implementing this Plan, the Belgian federal and subfederal authorities are cooperating in many fields, among which the fight against racism in football, holocaust education and law enforcement training on hate crimes.
- Mr. Chairman, the Belgian people also show their spontaneous solidarity, like they did in the case of death threats against the owner of a Belgian company for employing a Moroccan girl wearing the Islamic veil. His Majesty the King, joined by thousands of Belgians and politicians, reacted outraged by the threats, petitions were signed, actions of solidarity were organized and a wide range of civil society actors, among which the union of employers, showed their full support with the company, who was thus encouraged to ignore the threats. The case received wide media-attention.

Mr. Chairman, obviously our efforts in combating each and every form of intolerance should be equal. We do, of course, recognize that the distinctiveness of different forms of intolerance sometimes may require appropriate distinctive approaches. What concrete activities should be worked out on the ground to promote mutual respect and understanding in a diversified society? The answer to these questions should be found through close cooperation of state institutions, civil society and the economic sector. In this respect, we encourage all those who strive for integration while respecting diversity and thank the Slovenian Chairman in Office for having chosen integration as one of the key concepts of its activities in 2005.

Most certainly education, law enforcement, legislation and the media are crucial aspects of a comprehensive approach towards intolerance and we support ODIHR in addressing these themes, among others. Belgium regards ODIHR as the central instrument for

tackling intolerance and we commend ODIHR very much for the professional way in which it started up the tolerance and non-discrimination program.

This program has a cross-cutting, thematic and integrated approach, while keeping in mind all of the necessary specificities. Although ODIHR is there to assist them, Belgium is fully aware of the final responsibility of participating States themselves to implement the commitments they made on tolerance and non-discrimination.

Belgium also commends the work initiated by the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman in Office and encourages them to coordinate their activities closely with each other and ODIHR, following the Chairmanships' guidance.

Mr. Chairman, participating States have worked very hard on the issue of tolerance and non-discrimination these last years. This Conference on Anti-Semitism and Other Forms of Intolerance is another proof of the shared commitment to overcome all forms of intolerance. We feel it is important to ensure that the follow up of the tolerance and non-discrimination work within the OSCE takes place at an appropriate level ensuring the highest possible impact on the terrain. Exchanging ideas and information is crucial for building up sustainable policies and we should not forget that in the end we want to make a difference in the daily life of people. Therefore we feel that the most important aspect of a truly useful follow up to the tolerance and non-discrimination work in the OSCE would need to stress a systematic review of the implementation of our own commitments.

Belgium has proactively contributed to the efforts within the OSCE to promote Tolerance by hosting the OSCE-Conference on Tolerance and the fight against Racism, Xenophobia and Discrimination in September 2004. Building on the outcome of this Conference so ably hosted by the Spanish Government and continuing the efforts undertaken by the Slovenian Chairmanship, during the Belgian Chairmanship, we will continue by making sure that mutual respect and understanding, integration with respect for diversity and intercultural and inter-religious dialogue remain core issues within the Human Dimension.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.