



STATEMENT BY TURKEY

(Plenary Session 4 of the OSCE High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination: *Combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims*, Tirana, 21-22 May 2013)

Thank you Mr. Moderator.

It is a well-established fact that Muslims are being discriminated against in almost all walks of life in parts of the OSCE area, becoming targets of hostility and hate-motivated crimes. A study by the by the European Union's Fundamental Rights Agency published in 2009 found that 1 in 3 Muslims in the EU had experienced discrimination in the past 12 months. The Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Mr. Nils Muižnieks, issued a call in July 2012 against anti-Muslim prejudice.

In this session we would like to elaborate on these issues and present a number of recommendations. We will begin by sharing some views concerning the rising phenomenon of Islamophobia in Europe.

The former Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE on Combating Discrimination and Intolerance against Muslims, Ambassador Ömür Orhun, who is currently the Advisor and Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, has defined Islamophobia as follows: "Islamophobia is a contemporary form of racism and xenophobia motivated by unfounded fear, mistrust and hatred of Muslims and Islam. Islamophobia is also manifested through intolerance, discrimination, unequal treatment, prejudice, stereotyping, hostility and adverse public discourse. Differentiating from classical racism and xenophobia, Islamophobia is mainly based on stigmatization of a religion and its followers. As such, Islamophobia is an affront to the human rights and dignity of Muslims."

We can see clearly from this definition that Islamophobia in fact constitutes a violation of human rights. Given the crucial role we attach in the OSCE, as well as within the framework of various international norms and instruments, to upholding and promoting human rights and human dignity, it is our duty to combat all forms of human rights violations, including Islamophobia. It is a source

of deep concern that discrimination can specifically take place against persons and communities on the basis of their religion or belief. As we have previously underlined in Plenary Session 1, we should remember that promoting respect for religious and cultural diversity, including dialogue between and within religions and cultures, will no doubt contribute to a universal respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Thus there is a pressing need to seriously address the challenges presented by anti-Muslim sentiment and Islamophobia. Fueled by negative stereotyping and far-right propaganda, Islamophobia gives rise to acts of both psychological and physical aggression against members of Muslim communities, effectively constituting a threat to the security both of individuals and of societies in the OSCE area. What can be done to combat this threat?

We must bear in mind that intolerance, discrimination and hatred thrive when they find a place for themselves in everyday language. When and if Islamophobic discourse occurs, it must be publicly condemned. Prejudices should be examined from the scientific, rational and ethical viewpoints.

The key role of the media in addressing Islamophobia should be highlighted. The current prevalence of Islam and Muslims as major topics in practically all the Western media necessarily affects the ways in which people view and understand them. And though freedom of expression and artistic freedom are the cornerstones of democratic societies, these principles should not preclude the protection of individuals and communities from Islamophobic language, behaviors and actions. There is obviously a need for this issue to be addressed in a democratically acceptable way.

Integration strategies and action plans ought to be formulated and put into practice by promoting the idea of inclusion with diversity, around commonly shared democratic values. This entails recognition and respect for religious, philosophical and ideological differences as well as identities.

Islamophobia feeds on ignorance. Therefore the gap created by this knowledge deficit has to be filled through an effective learning and unlearning process. In this context Muslims must also work hard to correctly teach and present their faith, especially in Europe. They should also loudly condemn all forms of violence and terrorism. The ignorant and the narrow-minded are always waiting on the sidelines to abuse the absence or silence of those who know better.

The challenges presented by Islamophobia will not go away by themselves; indeed, if left unaddressed, all indications are that they will continue to grow and to worsen. If the OSCE fails to deal seriously and decisively with the scourge of Islamophobia, the impression could arise that our

Organization chooses to act only when particular issues are at stake, but ignores other matters of mutual concern even though they also have a bearing on core human rights and basic freedoms.

With this in mind we would like to make several recommendations to participating States as well as to the OSCE and its institutions, which complement the suggestions we have already expressed in Plenary Session 1.

- Hostility and hate crimes against Muslims have had a serious impact on the sense of security among Muslim communities. We call on all participating States to take the necessary legal, administrative and educational measures to combat manifestations of anti-Muslim sentiment, including stereotypes and prejudice against Muslims.

- Participating States should intensify their exchange of best practices in combating intolerance and discrimination towards Muslims, including examples of good cooperation between Muslim communities and law enforcement officers in combating hate crimes against members of these communities.

- Participating States should step up their efforts in monitoring and reporting on hate crimes, including a more effective partnering with civil society as well as the collection of disaggregated data in order to shed more light on the extent of manifestations of hostility towards Muslims.

- Participating States should develop community projects that aim to provide around-the-clock support to victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes; participating States should also take measures to thoroughly address forms of intolerance and discrimination other than hate crimes experienced by Muslim communities.

- Participating States should develop training programs on Islamophobia for law enforcement officers, other public officials, as well as teachers, clergy and imams, requesting ODIHR to provide the necessary support if required.

- Participating States should support and increase funding for the work of the ODIHR and the three Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office on combating intolerance and discrimination.

- Participating States should make better use of ODIHR's capacity to raise awareness on intolerance, discrimination and xenophobia. Additional activities can be proposed by ODIHR, within its current tasking, to tackle issues going beyond those addressed by current programs. ODIHR has the potential to do more, if provided with more resources.

- Participating States should initiate increased cooperation to address intolerant public discourse concerning Muslims, including by political leaders, in the media, and on the internet. In addition, ODIHR and the Representative on Freedom of the Media should enhance their collaboration in addressing anti-Muslim media activities, biased reporting and negative stereotyping.
- Participating States should consider possible avenues of cooperation and coordination in countering the growing cohesion and networking of across the OSCE area of groups promoting an Islamophobic agenda.
- Participating States should engage constructively and with goodwill in order to produce a draft decision in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination to be adopted at the Kyiv Ministerial Council, which should include, *inter alia*, a call for the elaboration of an OSCE action plan on tolerance and non-discrimination with a focus on combating racism and xenophobia.

Thank you.