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**STATEMENT BY MR. NURSULTAN NAZARBAYEV,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF KAZAKHSTAN, AT THE
OPENING SESSION OF THE OSCE HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON
TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Astana, 29 June 2010

Distinguished Conference participants,

The last decade of the last century and the first decade of this century have brought dramatic changes in the very understanding of tolerance and, most importantly, in actual policies in the OSCE area. And this is no accident because the conditions for co-operation between different ethnic groups, cultures, religions and civilizations have changed.

One might mention two fundamental changes underlying the increasingly difficult context for the policy of tolerance. First and foremost, there is the fact that since the times of the great migration of peoples there has never in the history of continental Europe been such a mass movement of millions of people from different parts of the world – millions of people together with their cultures, religions and values. And what seemed like an academic problem 20 years ago has now become a harsh everyday reality. In these conditions many old stereotypes, including many norms of political correctness, have simply come crashing down.

Tolerance and toleration, which were undoubtedly among European civilization's most important achievements in the period after the Second World War, are today becoming the subject of ever more intensive discussion.

We see manifestations of an alternative approach to political values in modern-day Europe. First and foremost, there is the rise in the popularity of nationalistic and extreme right-wing parties, which are frequently sceptical of tolerance as a political principle. There is also a significant change in migration policy compared with the situation 20 years ago. A tightening of requirements, an increase in barriers and a tougher position on linguistic and cultural barriers have greatly changed the criteria of tolerance in practice.

Lastly, religious identity has unfortunately become a factor that divides rather than unites people on the European continent. Manifestations of religious intolerance have become a factor not only in everyday behaviour but also in political behaviour.

We see clear signs that a significant number of social, ethnic and territorial conflicts are beginning to take on the appearance of religious conflicts. This adds to the problems of confessional tolerance even in countries with highly developed institutions to govern these relations.

All of this cannot but result in a very serious change in the understanding of tolerance in European countries, and in the understanding of the limits of this tolerance.

On the other hand, in the Eurasian part of the OSCE's area of responsibility we are observing no less complicated and dramatic processes. For a long time the mechanisms of totalitarian statehood led to an accumulation of inter-ethnic and interreligious problems in a vast territory from the Baltic Sea to the Pamir mountains. However, it must be noted in all fairness that during that time strict control did not allow conflicts to develop into an acute form resulting in large-scale armed clashes. This might be called "totalitarian tolerance". One of its tools was forced resettlements. However, this form of tolerance began to fail as early as the 1980s.

Over the last 20 years, quite a number of problems have developed in the sphere of ethnic and religious tolerance. Frequently this situation has resulted and is resulting in human casualties on a massive scale. Thousands of people have perished during these years.

The absence of the old mechanisms for resolving problems and a lack of experience in new ways of regulating these issues, the complexity of the ethnic composition of the region, unresolved problems of the past and a weak civil society – all of this makes the question of tolerance particularly relevant in the Eurasian part of the OSCE area.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As the country chairing the OSCE, Kazakhstan intends to contribute to the promotion of ideas of tolerance, inter-ethnic peace and interconfessional harmony in the OSCE area.

What are the distinctive features of the Kazakh model of tolerance that could be successfully adapted to the specific conditions of other OSCE States?

First, this model has been based on tolerance, toleration, hospitality and respect for other peoples, cultures and religions – all characteristic of the age-old history of the Kazakh people.

Second, in sovereign Kazakhstan tolerance has become not only a norm of political culture but also a key principle in State policy. Kazakhstan was in fact the first country in the OSCE area to create a unique public institution. The Assembly of Peoples of Kazakhstan has become a successful forum for dialogue in the co-ordination of the interests of different ethnic groups and religious confessions.

Third, the Kazakh policy of tolerance has from the outset included both an internal and an external dimension. Thanks to this fact, Kazakhstan's policy on tolerance is systematic, predictable and free of double standards. It is no accident that Kazakhstan is regarded by many OSCE countries as a possible mediator in the resolution of frozen conflicts.

Fourth, Kazakhstan is an active proponent of dialogue among civilizations. Our country is doing everything possible to promote the development of dialogue between the Muslim world and the West and is a member of the Group of Friends of the Alliance of Civilizations.

In 2008, at the initiative of our country, the “Common World: Progress through Diversity” forum of foreign ministers took place in Astana. Kazakhstan was the initiator and organizer of the successful holding of the three Congresses of the Leaders of World and Traditional Religions – a unique international forum to consolidate global interconfessional peace. Taking into account the important practical contribution made by Kazakhstan to the strengthening of dialogue among civilizations, the United Nations actively supported our proposal to have 2010 proclaimed the International Year of Rapprochement of Cultures.

Today there is an urgent need in the OSCE’s area of responsibility for dialogue among cultures, civilizations and religions. It is for this reason that when we talk about the third, humanitarian basket of the OSCE, we must remember that not only election processes should be the focus of our attention.

When we encounter urgent problems of a humanitarian nature, we need to give serious thought to our priorities. We believe that humanitarian issues are very important in the work of the OSCE and this problem must not be viewed in restricted terms.

I believe it is especially important to focus on studying and making use of the positive experience of tolerance in different regions through the elaboration of common approaches, without double standards.

Today the time has come for the work of the OSCE field missions to undergo serious revision. They do much useful work in different areas – from environmental issues to gender policy. At the same time, I believe that an emphasis on issues of ethnic and religious tolerance could become a key element in their activities. The problem of tolerance has a very high price in terms of human life. If the OSCE field missions were to become an additional force in the efforts to resolve these issues, this would be a most important contribution by the Organization in our part of the world.

Lastly, there is a need to overcome the stereotypes of the OSCE itself as an organization. The changes in language, migration, religious, cultural and education policy that we observe in the OSCE participating States have not been given proper consideration at the collective level.

I believe that we must all work together in summarizing the recent serious shifts in the policy of tolerance and produce a common document, which I would tentatively call “The OSCE: Towards Tolerance in the New Decade”.

We are proposing that this question be included on the agenda of the forthcoming OSCE summit.

As you know, tolerance, together with trust, tradition and transparency, is the main policy direction for the Kazakh Chairmanship of the OSCE.

In this context, we believe it useful to consider two institutional proposals.

The first is the need to create an OSCE centre on tolerance and non-discrimination. Central Asia is a region with a complicated ethnic picture in terms of its population. Here different peoples have lived side by side for centuries. The bitterest consequence of the

conflict in Kyrgyzstan is that the seeds of mistrust can be sown between other peoples of the region. This represents a significant challenge to stability in the region and a threat to all OSCE participating States. Essentially, the alliance in the fight against international terrorism and extremism, the front line of which passes through our neighbour Afghanistan, is weakening. Chaos and destabilization in the region play into the hands of the organizers of illicit trafficking in narcotic drugs, arms and human beings.

The second point is that consideration should be given to the possible establishment within the OSCE of the post of a High Commissioner on Inter-Ethnic and Interreligious Tolerance. I firmly believe that such an institution would help to develop dialogue between different ethnic and religious communities in OSCE countries, prevent conflicts and quickly resolve tensions as they arise. This would undoubtedly help to increase the authority and effectiveness of the entire Organization.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Among all the peoples of the world one finds the age-old maxim that hate cannot stop hate, but hate can be overcome through the absence of hate.

I am confident that our Conference will generate new forward-looking ideas for promoting tolerance and non-discrimination and combating all forms of intolerance. The positive experience and practical endeavours in this vitally important sphere must become the common property of all the countries in the vast area from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

I wish all the participants in the Conference fruitful work.

Thank you for your attention.