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Swiss Delegation to the OSCE

STATEMENT AT THE CONFERENCE ON RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION

4-5 September 2003

Mr. Chairman,

We are gathered here today for a conference focusing on the whole problem of racism, xenophobia and intolerance. As has already been mentioned, we are dealing with an important task set by the Ministerial Council in Porto and its Decision on Tolerance.

This Conference is concerned, among other things, with the protection of some of the most central values which are indispensable for respectful coexistence. These values - I am thinking here of tolerance, respect and solidarity to name just a few - represent both the foundations and the leitmotif of various efforts to strengthen human dignity. These values contribute to the successful establishment of an environment in which the human being is respected and supported both as an individual and as a member of a community. It is surely *disturbing* that these values, which form an essential part of all our cultures, are being so widely and seriously ignored at the start of the twenty-first century, not least in the OSCE area as well. Given this background, it is understandable and, above all, right that this Conference is being held. The purpose of holding such a conference is to recall things of fundamental importance, because tolerance - to give one example - cannot be decreed by means of an action plan. Tolerance is rather an attitude which represents an achievement of human culture and something which should be evident in *all* areas of life, including politics.

This Conference gives us all a welcome opportunity to further strengthen solidarity in the fight against racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

Mr. Chairman,

Tolerance is, and will remain, one of the central prerequisites for peaceful coexistence in our societies. My delegation has already stressed that it sees tolerance, among other things, as the willingness to engage in respectful discussion with those who are different. However, tolerance also means the desire to learn from one another without relinquishing one's own values and convictions. Education, upbringing and culture play an extremely important role in this context. They help to break down prejudices and build up trust.

Not so long ago, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Walter Schwimmer, spoke in this hall of the importance of *intercultural and interreligious dialogue*. Nothing could be more true, not least of all in view of the challenges

associated with combating terrorism. Our Organization and this conference in particular offer a welcome platform to conduct this dialogue on the basis of our common values.

Mr. Chairman,

My delegation is aware that all this will happen *only if we work together*. It is therefore also clear to my delegation that here no country has the role of giving others advice let alone lecturing them. What we should strive for here is *to understand together and to deal with these issues together*. If we proceed in that way, we can strengthen the belief that in the long run **we will all - both as individuals and as members of a community** - profit from the successful combating of racism, xenophobia and intolerance.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.