

Statement by Professor Talip Kucukcan
Personal Representative of the OSCE-Chairperson-in-Office
On Combating Discriminations and intolerance against Muslims,
HDIM 2014, September 30, Warsaw

Dear Chairman,

I would like to thank you for your invitation to make a statement on the situation of Muslim in the OSCE region and highlight the significant concerns and emerging issues that the participating states should take into consideration.

First, I would like to underline the major concerns of Muslims that impact attitudes, behaviors and policies towards Islam and Muslim communities across OSCE countries and national governments.

As reported by Muslims organizations, research centers, think tanks and the media, there is a worrying trend to securitize Islam and Muslims. Securitization of Muslims leads to perceiving them as a national security threat that is similar to the post 9/11 era. The tragic events in the Middle East also fuels securitization of Muslims. This trend leads to essentialized ideas and views about Islam and Muslims. There are mainly two main side-effects of such fixed ideas; one is on the societal level that puts the Muslims under the spot with stigmatization, intolerance and discrimination that might be called Islamophobia which is becoming an ideology. On the political level one sees the emergence of a negative discourse aired by politicians on Muslims as manifested in elections in several countries where the far right scored very high. The other aspect on the political level is the introduction of strict laws against the perceived threats that curtails religious liberties. The OSCE participating states should re-consider the consequences of securitization of Islam and Muslims if they seek to integrate them as equal citizens and they should start taking measures for the de-securitization process to build a mutual trust.

One of the major concerns of Muslims is the increasing amount of violence against Muslims individuals and their institutions. Several equality bodies in the OSCE region continuously report incidents against Muslims, with an aggravation in the nature of the cases, as some perpetrators move from discrimination to physical violence. It is reported that Mosques and community centres have also been targeted by hate groups on several instances. In a large number of incidents, Muslim women are specifically targeted and are often denied access to work, education or public services. Although intolerant behaviour as well as physical violence against Muslims is on the increase, discrimination and hate crimes against Muslims are still massively under-reported and under-recorded (except 23 countries since 2013). It is obvious that such incidents should be monitored, reported and recorded more effectively. It is also obvious that Muslim and their institutions need to be protected by security forces.

State policies towards Muslims seem to influence their sense of belonging and the process of integration. It is reported by researchers and Muslim civil society organizations that for a number of young individuals, marginalization and discriminatory policies fuel the idea that Muslims are not treated on the same basis as their fellow citizens, leaving them in a vulnerable position, when they don't feel to be part of the community anymore. In this context, we also see some very negative side effects of the situation in the Middle East, with Muslim minorities being stigmatized and held responsible for a feeling of insecurity in the public opinion, resulting in anti-terror policies that can infringe on fundamental freedoms. It

is important to remind that OSCE participating States have made clear and reaffirmed that “the identification of terrorism and extremism with Islam and Muslims has to be firmly rejected”, as stated in the Cordoba Declaration (2007)

As far as daily life and religious practices of Muslims are concerned, there are serious concerns as to the future of Muslim minorities in some OSCE countries. Observation of religious rituals is a fundamental part of religious freedom. However, restrictions on veiling, circumcision and ritual slaughter are cause of concern for Muslims, and therefore such issues should be addressed in the context of religious liberties.

Hate speech against Muslims in the conventional press and social media is increasing. Given the wide spread use of social media and its influence on society and policies, the social media should be monitored and measures should be taken to prevent the hate speech against Muslims and other religions.

It should be noted that governments and equality bodies, in some participating States, are acknowledging the reality of the phenomenon and taking serious measures to tackle intolerance against Muslims or manifestations of racism and discrimination against Muslims.

It is an important progress that needs to be sustained and encouraged. In this context, participating States should reaffirm their commitment to tackling discrimination and intolerance against Muslims, by expressing a strong political will, at the national and international levels. Participating states should support projects focusing on developing and improving the monitoring of hate crimes and discriminations against Muslims.