

2007 OSCE Mediterranean Seminar, Tel-Aviv, 19th December 2007

Concluding remarks of Ambassador Dan Ashbel, Israel

Mr. Chairman, dear Colleagues,

This is the first time I'm taking the floor in this seminar, but even at this late hour, I would like to thank the CIO for taking the decision to have the Med. Partners' Seminar in Israel. You Mr. Chairman I want to thank for your ongoing efforts to lead this group of Partners throughout a turbulent year. As we're close to the end of the Seminar I think it is about time to say a big THANK YOU to the tireless team of the Secretariat, Ghada, Aldona, Fabrizio and Oleksander who, both behind the scenes, and in front of them, worked tirelessly and enabled us to enjoy a smooth Seminar. Dear Colleagues, allow me also to use this opportunity to thank my friends and colleagues from the MFA in preparing the Seminar and taking care of all the needed details. Special thanks to Ambassador Yaffa Ben-Ari, to Boaz Rodkin, Marco Sermoneta, and last but not least to Galit Cohen.

I don't want to miss expressing our deep gratitude to the Hon. Alcee L. Hastings for his never ending efforts to bring about understanding among the Med. Partners, especially in the framework of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE.
Dear friends,

All Israeli speakers, throughout this seminar have pointed out our commitment to the OSCE as an organization, and more than that, to the values it represents. We attach great importance to our ties with the OSCE, as well as to the group of the Med. Partners. It seems, however that there are different levels of commitment to this framework amongst its members. Some partners preferred to avoid the invitation of the OSCE, because the venue was not to their liking. Others decided to try and be "half pregnant". Register but be almost unseen in the seminar itself. I believe that an attitude of this kind puts a big question mark on the future of this group. As important as this group of Med. Partners may be, it still is but a tool intended to enhance understanding, further dialogue, and promote mutual respect. The question that must be asked is, "Are those who avoided Tel-Aviv interested in real dialogue? Do they want to promote mutual respect and understanding, and are they really ready to combat intolerance and discrimination"? I believe we all and especially the OSCE should demand honest answers to these questions. It is not enough to point fingers at others and blame them for intolerance against Muslims and Islam. One must also look into his or her own backyard and fight the prejudices, lack of human rights and intolerance. Remember, that whoever points one finger at the other, points three fingers at himself.

Dear Colleagues,

In the passed two days we had an opportunity to listen to women and men who are involved and committed, on a daily basis, to improving the relations between people and peoples. We witnessed genuine efforts to promote mutual understanding, and learned about programs and projects that all have one thing in common: make our society one in which all will feel comfortable. Not much is needed in order to reach this goal. It is just the understanding that we're all human beings, and everyone of us

is entitled to have her or his rights. I believe this goal can be achieved. It takes courage to be ready to listen to the other, show sympathy and understanding to the needs and beliefs of the other, and take action to assure the rights of those who think and act in different ways than we do. Dialogue can bring us closer to these targets, provided it is a genuine dialogue and not like an Israeli comedian once said, when he described the difference between a monologue and a dialogue, "Monologue is one person talking to himself Dialogue is two persons talking to themselves".

My dear friends,

I believe we will all have something to reflect on after this seminar. I hope that we will have many more meetings that will bring us all closer, and hope that those who failed to be with us here, will get their act together and contribute their part in promoting understanding that will lead to peace.

Please allow me to use this opportunity to wish you all a Merry Christmas, Happy Id alAdha, and a happy new year.