

Opening Session

ENGLISH only

**Fighting anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and other forms of
discrimination, and promoting tolerance: from
recommendations to implementation**

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Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentleman,

I would like to, first of all, express our thanks to the Slovenian Chairmanship and our Spanish hosts for their dedicated efforts in organizing this Conference.

I find it very meaningful that we meet today in Cordoba- a city which has for centuries been a venue of interaction and sharing among cultures and civilizations as well as a symbol of respect for diversity. It was in this part of the world that the second wave of Islamic philosophy and science, which was universal in form and content, had flourished and contributed greatly to the development of European thought in general and Renaissance in particular. It was here that Muslims, Jews and Christians created a constructive and creative form of coexistence which lasted until the so-called "Catholic supremacy". This achievement was also one of the major sources of the *pax ottomana*, i.e., the Ottoman "Millet System" which also embraced the Jews of Andoluz- a system that still draws the attention of many first class social and political scientists. The Turkish Republic has molded its modern philosophy and practice of the regime of toleration out of this historical experience and strengthened it by the inclusion of the Western achievements in this field.

The challenges the international community faces today, however, are formidable. Manifestations of racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia and discrimination pose a serious threat to democracy, to universal values and ultimately to the world security and peace. Unless we urgently devise effective tools to tackle them, peace, stability and security in the OSCE area will definitely be endangered. The high level gathering here today is a solid demonstration of the strong political will to address these important issues.

As a matter of vital importance to societal harmony, it is crucial that the political leadership in every country actually raises to the task of leading every effort at local, regional, national and international level to create political, social and economic conditions in order to inhibit the breeding ground for irksome intolerance and discrimination. A key part of that leadership role is the formulation of pro-active and positive measures aimed at countering prejudices and promoting human values,

tolerance and respect for diversity. I believe that we are now in a position to formulate a rational, or at least reasonable, framework which can give us the opportunity to visualize a policy of “inclusion with diversity”. In such practice of unity democratic values such as respect for human dignity, justice, equality, rule of law, transparency and accountability, on which there is a large degree of cognitive agreement, shall be at the center. National governments and international organizations and civil society have no right to remain at a neutral position visa-vis these values. As for other cultural values, i.e., our human and humane diversity, tolerance, as a moral and political value or virtue, is absolutely needed so as to avoid all sorts of discrimination.

Respecting diversity, however, does not mean creating “parallel societies” separated by walls of indifference, ignorance and hostility. Multiculturalism or “cultural diversity” should not be used as an excuse for ignoring the fundamental human rights.

Mr. Chairman,

We all know how anti-Semitism grew and paved the way for incredible destruction and unbearable suffering. It is still with us and constitutes a major threat. We should draw the necessary lesson from history and never ignore the development of other forms of discrimination against other races, religions and cultural orientations.

I am very glad to see that many national and international institutions, including OSCE, have begun to open our eyes to see the whole picture in which discrimination against Muslims also take place. For example, the Council of Europe, in its Third Summit on 16-17 May 2005 in Warsaw, clearly stated that “We strongly condemn all forms of intolerance and discrimination... including anti-Semitism and Islamophobia. We affirm our determination to further develop, within the Council of Europe, rules and effective machinery to prevent and eradicate them”

Needless to say, an effective strategy for eradication cannot solely rely on legal, political and judicial measures. An intellectual and ethical dimension should also be brought to life in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of the cultural and ideological roots of these phenomena. In most instances, intolerance is based on the fear that other cultures and religions constitute a threat to self identity and the values cherished. We should address these fears collectively.

The desired level of mutual respect and harmony in our societies can only be achieved by changing our mind-sets and behavioral patterns of the public. In this regard, education and media are the two significant tools to foster mutual understanding, social cohesion, appreciation and respect for the “Other”. Here we need a true and a deep dialogue among cultures. And this dialogue must be carried out at three major levels. First we are desperately in need of reliable knowledge. We know that in many cases discrimination is the child of ignorance, stereotyping, generalization and so on. Secondly, we have to use our critical ability well and fully. And thirdly, we should never miss the ethical and existential dimension of the whole effort. Knowing should lead us to becoming.

In this context, I would also like to commend the ongoing work of the Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office for their dedication and important contribution in raising awareness of the OSCE's role in cultural dialogues and the fight against discrimination and promotion of tolerance.

Mr. Chairman,

In conclusion, I would like to remind our audience that Turkey has actively participated in and contributed to all previous Conferences and events on tolerance and non-discrimination issues. We are fully committed to the fight against all forms of intolerance and discrimination.

We attach utmost importance to the necessity to address all forms of intolerance and discrimination on *an equal basis with an* urgent seriousness. Any prioritization among them would constitute an act of discrimination in itself. I hope that the results of this Conference will help ensure that different forms of intolerance and discrimination are approached holistically while taking into account their unique characteristics, origins and developments. In the future work of the OSCE on tolerance and non-discrimination, we should avoid parallel tracks and separate conferences at the political level. Like many others in this Hall, we expect Cordoba Conference to open a new chapter in the process and clear the way for an action- and implementation-oriented approach.

We look forward to the discussions at the Working Sessions which we believe will provide all of us with not only an opportunity for reflection but also clear guidelines as to what must be done next, including the follow-up to this Conference.