

**HDIM-2013 statement
Adil Ahkmetov
CIO PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE
INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS**

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

Intolerance and discrimination against Muslims remains a challenge to stability, democracy and human rights across the OSCE region.

With the view of responding to this challenge, since 2002, OSCE participating States have adopted a range of commitments to combat acts of violence and discrimination against Muslims and foster mutual understanding through education and awareness-raising. They have strongly rejected association of terrorism and violent extremism with any particular religion.

However, despite the efforts of participating States to protect human rights for all and promote respect for diversity, acts related to racist and xenophobic attitudes, in particular, those targeting Muslims, persist in many parts of the OSCE region.

Anti-Muslim backlashes, violent attacks on mosques and individuals who look like Muslim, religious profiling and violations of the freedom of religion are continuous manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. As reported by various human rights bodies and community-based organizations, these lead to the feeling of insecurity, exclusion and alienation among Muslims.

The backlashes following the Boston Bombing and the Woolwich Soldier Murder in London demonstrate that it is not enough to develop rapid responses to the situations of crisis; there must be also long term comprehensive strategies and policies in place in order to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and promote social cohesion.

Participating States should draw more political attention to the extent of violence used in physical attacks on Muslim communities. The terrorist plots targeting several mosques in the UK and France are recent examples of this worrying trend, which we already observed in the Oslo massacre and the spate of neo-Nazi serial killings in Germany. The responses by governments and their political leadership to these incidents are commendable, but both OSCE institutions and participating States still need to do more to prevent the threats posed by violent organizations and individuals on the security of Muslims in North America and Europe.

In addition to developing more comprehensive security policies, this would require enhanced co-operation between law enforcement officers and Muslim communities in combating hate crimes. However, anti-Muslim hate crimes remain significantly under-reported and under-recorded, because the victims have the perception that

they will not be taken seriously by the police or some police officers have biased views about Muslims. Participating States should increase confidence in law enforcement by avoiding the practice of religious profiling, conducting training activities for police officers to deconstruct stereotypes against Muslims, promoting religious diversity in public services and institutionalizing co-operation with Muslim community-based organizations. In these efforts, special attention should be paid to the vulnerability of Muslim women to hate crimes.

Furthermore, participating States should have a better understanding of the context when and how anti-Muslim hate crimes are being committed, because as indicated in ODIHR's annual hate crime reports, such crimes do not take place in a vacuum. There are a number of indicators concerning the motives behind these incidents suggesting that the perpetrators are influenced by the widespread prejudices and stereotypes about Muslims. Glorification and justification of hatred, such as the Oslo massacre, and the spread of conspiracy theories against Muslims through the Internet should concern all of us and must be consistently countered across the OSCE region. To this end, political figures and the media should take the lead in raising awareness of intolerance against Muslims and promote mutual understanding through public campaigns and educational activities.

But first and foremost, by preventing discriminatory practices against Muslims, especially violations of their freedom of religion or belief, States should send a clear message to the society that intolerance against Muslims is not acceptable. For this reason, governments should refrain from intervening in the religious matters of Muslims, in particular, in relation to the election of their religious leaders and appointment of imams. They should also ensure that any restriction to the manifestation of religion or belief does not lead to direct or indirect discrimination against a certain community. The issues concerning access to places of worship and wearing religious clothes should be resolved in accordance with the established international human rights standards and in a broad consultation with all stakeholders.

During my country visits I have been pleased to observe that there is increasing civil society activism to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. Government institutions should work closely with these NGOs and support their activities to prevent and respond to hate crimes as well as promote freedom of religion.

I also strongly encourage participating States to draw on ODIHR's expertise in combating hate crimes and developing educational programmes to counter stereotypes. Since 2011, ODIHR has provided training seminars for NGOs on hate crimes against Muslims in a number of countries, including Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany and Spain. I hope that these activities will continue in the future. Moreover, since 2012, ODIHR has organized several regional roundtable meetings for government officials, experts and civil society representative to promote the *Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance against Muslims* and collect recommendations from participants. I look forward to seeing the implementation of these recommendations.

In conclusion, I would like to highlight once more that intolerance and discrimination against Muslims have devastating affects not only on the daily lives of members of Muslim communities, but also on society as a whole and relations between countries, leading to tensions and undermining our democratic values. We can overcome this challenge, only if we work together, with a commitment to protect and promote human rights for everybody.