

**OSCE CONFERENCE ON COMBATING DISCRIMINATION AND PROMOTING
MUTUAL RESPECT AND UNDERSTANDING
(7-8 June 2007, Bucharest)**

Session 2: Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

Thank you Mr. Moderator,

In my introductory intervention this morning I have already underlined our growing concern with respect to acts that manifest intolerance and discrimination against Muslims in the OSCE geography. The frequency and regularity of news about incidents motivated by hate against Muslims have assumed depressing proportions. They are now being monitored and reported extensively by NGOs and international human rights bodies in a globalized world. The more data on anti-Muslim hate crimes and incidents become available, the deeper our understanding will become to measure the magnitude of the plight of Muslims facing discrimination and the risks that this phenomenon poses to the moral fabric of our societies and their harmony. I fear that what we know as of now may only be the tip of the iceberg.

Most recently, we received a disturbing piece of news that not only individuals are subject to discrimination on the basis of their religion but that such discrimination is being transposed over to their places of worship, resulting in discrimination of the minarets of their mosques against the bell towers of the churches. I hope mature democracies of our partners will find ways to overcome such flagrant discrimination before it becomes embedded in legislation. Because as the level of political acceptability of Islamophobia widens, it would invariably reinforce the belief of legally residing Muslims in host countries as a minority that they are not wanted, thus leading to stifling efforts toward their integration.

We recognize that politicians often do not invent fears but rather use them for political capital. Everyday fears mobilize people more than anything else and can affect their voting behaviour. Countering such ideologies of intolerance based on political expediency would require wise leadership who can take political risks for long-term interests of society, who can explain to the electorate that communal harmony would be safeguarded and reinforced if Muslim minorities are integrated and perceived as an asset rather than an enemy and that there is a need to isolate and discredit extremists who manipulate grievances of the marginalized and the stigmatized. A wise leadership would bridge the gap between what Islam actually is and what it is perceived to be. The war against terrorists, as they have no visible armies, should be first and foremost fought at the intellectual and ethical fronts aiming to win the hearts and minds of the people. This is not about politically correct anti-racism or naïve multiculturalism or even the defence of the human rights of Muslims living in the West. It is about the security of all of our citizens.

Mr. Moderator,

A serious effort to address Islamophobia in all its aspects cannot ignore the role of Muslims themselves as His Royal Highness Prince Hassan of Jordan has eloquently recognized in his moving address this morning. There is a need to effectively explain that Islam, like the other major religions, neither condones nor approves of killing innocents and promotes ideals of compassion, justice and respect for the dignity of life. It must be underlined on every occasion that Islam preaches integration and participation in a non-Muslim society, not isolation. Muslims, as exemplified by the Turkish people, not only can embrace the democratic values but also make them a part of their identity.

Turkey in its part has been actively engaged in addressing and reversing the current political polarization and the perception of widening rift between the West and the Islamic World, not least within the OSCE. As for the proceedings of this session and hoping to contribute to the preparations of the Cordoba Conference to address Islamophobia, I would like to make the following recommendations:

- A working definition of Islamophobia should be developed by the OSCE in cooperation with other international agencies working in this field.
- Participating States should collect and disseminate reliable data on hate crimes against Muslims. ODIHR should assist participating States upon their request.
- The Chairmanship of the OSCE should encourage and facilitate the establishment of a network of Muslim NGOs working in the fields of integration and anti-discrimination in the OSCE region, for example within the context of the Cordoba Conference and the Youth Forum later this year.
- The NGOs representing the interests of the Muslim communities should work together with the NGOs of other vulnerable communities to foster solidarity and synergy in their activities and responses to hate incidents.
- The authorities of participating States should provide for more opportunities for dialogue and cooperation with the Muslim communities at both national and local levels recognizing ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity among them.
- Intolerant public discourse against Muslims and Islam should be countered by political leaders through responsible and constructive discourse.
- Media should be encouraged to provide more access to the Muslim communities to make their views and stories heard.

Thank you.