

**OSCE Chairmanship Conference  
on Intolerance and Discrimination  
against Muslims  
(Cordoba, 9-10 October 2007)**

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Plenary Session 3: Media and public  
discourse as instruments to counter  
Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

**Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Azerbaijan**

*As delivered by H.E. Ambassador Mahmud Mamed-Kuliyev, Deputy  
Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan*

Dear Mr. Moderator,  
Distinguished speakers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

The role of the media in establishment and consolidation of tolerance and mutual understanding between religions is extremely important. On the one hand, media can be a powerful tool in fostering religious and cultural dialogue by providing opportunities for all of us to learn about each other's cultures and beliefs.

On the other hand, media can serve as a weapon for incitement or exacerbation of religious tension, as it was in the case of publications of well-known cartoons and other materials. This raises a number of questions. First, whether these publications were intentional actions. If yes, who stands behind them? I don't pretend to be that right, but I am not excluding the idea that these publications were deliberate provocative actions. Unfortunately, as far I as know, not a single serious and in-depth

investigation of this version has ever been conducted. In our view, in case of recurrence of such actions they should be carefully examined.

Another question is how we can ensure the responsible functioning of the media while not impeding the right to freedom of expression. It is out of question that any attempt by public authorities to supervise the media may be considered as interference into media's independence. Against this background, self regulation of the media has to play a key role in preventing irresponsibility of media outlets. We think that self regulation should be encouraged in order for the media to use its power for the sake of peace and dialogue, rather than for the incitement to inter-religious and intercultural tensions.

Being devoted to promotion of religious and cultural tolerance and realizing the role of media in this process, Azerbaijan, in its capacity as a Chair of the Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers, has recently hosted an international conference on the role of media in the development of tolerance and mutual understanding within the framework of Organization of Islamic Conference. This was a good forum for vivid discussions and exchange of best practices among government officials, with participation of international organizations and civil society experts as well as media representatives from a number of countries. One lesson learnt from this conference was that such events could be very useful not only for exchange of views between relevant stakeholders but also for drawing public attention to the issue. We believe that the follow-up to this conference can be provided also under the umbrella of the OSCE or together with the OIC.

In conclusion, I would like to make a few recommendations on strengthening the role of the media in ensuring tolerance and non-discrimination against Muslims. In particular, it would be useful

- to raise public awareness about tenets and values of Islam through sound debates in the media;
- to revise media editorial policies and reporting practices in order to properly reflect non-discrimination and tolerance-related issues;
- to develop various media campaigns promoting tolerance at national, regional and international levels;
- to avoid using ambiguous terminology by the media in matters concerning religion that could be understood or interpreted as offensive;
- to join efforts to address the real root causes of publications in media which stir up religious tensions; and
- to fully support and, if necessary, strengthen all international institutions dealing with the above-mentioned issues.

My Government is willing and ready to contribute to this process.

I thank you.