

**OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Intolerance
and Discrimination against Muslims
Cordoba, 9 – 10 October 2007
Session 5**

The text of the statement of Mr. Ufuk Gokcen, Adviser to the OIC Secretary General, read on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference General Secretariat

Cordoba, 9 October 2007

Mr. Moderator
Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the OIC General Secretariat and its Secretary General Prof. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, I convey our cordial greetings to the participants of this important gathering.

I would also like to convey our gratitude to Spain for its timely and praiseworthy initiative, to highlight as the OSCE Chairman in Office, an increasing, but rarely acknowledged phenomenon, which is the growing tendency of Islamophobia, that is to say discrimination and intolerance against Muslims.

We believe that recognition by the OSCE countries of, discrimination and intolerance against Muslims as a challenge to the peace and security is a right step in the right direction.

At the OIC General Secretariat we appreciate the positive engagement established between us and the OSCE General Secretariat as well as ODIHR. We are ready to further our cooperation with these two OSCE institutions as well as individual member states. The OSCE Ministerial Council decisions regarding the role of the OSCE General Secretariat in the Alliance of Civilizations might provide the necessary framework for such a cooperation, as both the organizations are staunch supporters of the Alliance of Civilizations project. We believe that Alliance of Civilizations project also provides the right framework and a workable roadmap for all the members of the international community, international institutions and civil society to translate their will into concrete action.

We also highly value, and praise, the commendable efforts of Ambassador Omur Orhun, Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman in Office, to raise awareness regarding the increasing tendency of discrimination and intolerance against Muslims and highlight the ways and means of cooperation to tackle the phenomenon within the OSCE area.

We also consider that recent initiatives by some OSCE member states are quite promising and constitute appropriate and effective approaches to promote mutual understanding, respect and tolerance between the Muslim world and the Western world. In this framework, we would particularly pay tribute to the efforts of five OSCE countries, three of them also OIC members, namely, Turkey, Spain, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Slovenia.

Ladies and Gentlemen

The OIC General Secretariat does not suggest that tackling discrimination and tolerance targeting Muslims should have priority over other forms of discrimination and tolerance targeting others. As the voice and propagator of moderation, modernization, development and transformation in the Islamic world, as opposed to extremism and backwardness, we are involved and ready for cooperation in addressing all sorts of discrimination and intolerance.

We also know that tackling defamation of religions and of religious symbols, which causes high sensitivity within the Muslim world and among the Muslim communities around the world, could not have been made a priority within the OSCE area due to various reasons.

However, in the wider picture, we do not see that the challenge that we face today can be properly addressed, if the official authorities and politicians do not assume ethically and morally righteous and responsible attitude in front of the masses, when discrimination and intolerance against Muslims, and defamation of Islam as a religion and denigration of its most revered symbols are condoned under the exercise of freedom of expression and press, in a way to surmount time to time to explicit and calculated incitement to hatred.

Actually, our challenge is about misperceptions and intentional stereotyping but also about ignorance and growing misrepresentation. Human rights dimension is important but combating the phenomenon on legal bases alone will not eliminate the root causes.

Here, we think we need political engagement, which will reach out to the grassroots with the proper and willing media support. Ultimately, the call of the OIC Secretary General for a historical reconciliation between the proper institutions of the Christian and Islamic world could also be instrumental in showing us the way forward. Within the context of these last points the OIC General Secretariat stands ready to do its best.

We believe that the Annual Islamophobia Report which will be issued next year by the OIC Islamophobia Observatory will constitute an important contribution to the international efforts to tackle the issue with all its aspects.

Let me also add that we highly value our ongoing cooperation with the Council of Europe in the areas of revision of the school textbooks and youth projects.

Lastly, in the fields of political engagement, media, youth, education and integration, the OIC will not be hesitant to cooperate with all relevant partners.

Let us work together to inject real meaning into the infamous word of "dialogue" and let us not allow extremists on both sides hijack our future.

Thank you for your attention.