

Statement of the Permanent Representative of the Netherlands to the OSCE in the Permanent Council of 10 April 2008 under Current Issues

Thank you Mr Chairman,

I would like to thank the Ambassador of Turkey, the Ambassador of the United States, the Ambassador of Tunisia, the Ambassador of Egypt and the Ambassador of Algeria who made a statement this morning on behalf of the Arab Ambassadors Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation with the OSCE as well as the Deputy Permanent Representative of Algeria, for their engagement regarding the issue of the release of the film "Fitna". Let me use this occasion to thank all those, also here in Vienna, who have been supportive of the Netherlands Government policy in this complex matter.

The complexity of the issue is reflected in the statement made by Prime Minister Balkenende upon the release of the film. The Prime Minister stated, amongst others: "Muslims, Christians and people of other convictions can easily live together in peace. The problem is not religion, but misuse of religion to sow hatred and intolerance (...).

The Dutch Government stands for a society in which freedom and respect go hand in hand. Such a society demands dedication and commitment. We oppose extremism. Anyone who breaks the law is dealt with firmly. Let us solve problems by working together. Let us reach out to others and build confidence and trust. Let us conquer prejudice. We shall surely succeed".

Mr. Chairman, we have copies of the full statement available for those who are not yet familiar with it.

Consequently, the EU Presidency stated, amongst others: "It is not through the violence but through an open dialogue of opinions under the protection of the freedom of expression that mutual understanding can be deepened and mutual respect can be built".

Mr. Chairman,

The Netherlands respect all religions and beliefs and it will continue to combat hatred, discrimination and intolerance. In this context I would like to reiterate our commitment to the Alliance of Civilisations. We believe it is important that the Alliance of Civilisations deliver tangible results in a short period. As a member of the Group of Friends the Netherlands has indicated its willingness to make a financial contribution to the development of a clearing house for the exchange of best practices.

Thank you.