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FRENCH DELEGATION, AT THE OSCE HIGH-LEVEL
CONFERENCE ON TOLERANCE AND NON-DISCRIMINATION**

Astana, 29 and 30 June 2010

Mr. Chairperson,
Excellencies,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour for me to represent France at the Astana High-Level Conference on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination. I should like first of all to congratulate the Kazakh Chairmanship of the OSCE and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) on their initiative in organizing this gathering.

The combating of discrimination and the promotion of tolerance are a priority for France. The pursuit of these goals is essential to ensure full respect for the indefeasible principle that all human beings are born equal in dignity and rights, a principle enshrined in the first article of the French Declaration on the Rights of Man and the Citizen of 1789 and in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. They are essential to ensure the cohesion of our societies, their stability and their security, because intolerance and manifestations of hatred are factors in promoting internal conflicts and conflicts between States.

Manifestations of discrimination and intolerance are still too frequent around the world. The OSCE area, unfortunately, is no exception. We must therefore continue our struggle against discrimination in all its forms, without making any exceptions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Every State has a responsibility to carry on this struggle, first of all on its own territory.

At the national level, French legislation prohibits all direct or indirect discrimination based on real or supposed membership of an ethnic group or race, religion, convictions, age, disability, sexual orientation or gender.

France takes determined action to apply this legislation. One of our main objectives is to promote access of the victims to the courts. Another is to enable victims to obtain

compensation and to ensure that those responsible for discrimination, abuse or violence are prosecuted and punished.

Many specific measures have been adopted.

We have strengthened co-operation between government services and non-governmental organizations in order to enable offences of a racist character to be detected more effectively on the ground and to encourage the lodging of complaints.

We have established anti-discrimination centres which are attached to the courts, maintain close contact with civil society organizations and constitute a veritable local network for combating discrimination.

We have developed special training programmes for justice professionals and the police and gendarmerie, and awareness-raising programmes have been organized in schools.

We now have an independent authority, whose work is of recognized importance, at the hub of our institutional machinery: the High-Level Authority for Combating Discrimination and Promoting Equality takes action on a priority basis on questions of access to employment, housing and education. It is responsible for helping victims and possesses investigative powers. It can take matters to the courts. It also carries out a great deal of communication and information work to promote equality.

Mr. Chairperson,

The battle for tolerance and against discrimination is also waged by France in international forums, where it works tirelessly for equality, respect and mutual understanding – in the OSCE and elsewhere.

We attach the greatest importance to combating racism and discrimination. But the struggle must protect individuals and not ways of thinking. This is a fundamental principle from which we cannot depart. France will always be vigilant on this point. Cultural difficulties cannot justify offences against human dignity – and I am thinking particularly of the dignity of women. There can be no exceptions other than those foreseen in international human rights law with regard to freedom of religion and conscience, which means, in particular, the right to have or not to have a religion, the right to change one's religion and manifest it and, naturally, the absolute right to freely express one's opinion on religions, with absolute respect for the persons practising them.

I am aware of certain unhealthy developments, particularly on the Internet, where racist or anti-Semitic comments are too often propagated. France has set about trying to combat such propagation, which is contrary to its values. It was one of the first countries to ratify the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Cybercrime concerning the dissemination of racist and xenophobic material on the Internet. We urge the ratification of this essential instrument by the largest possible number of States.

The battle for tolerance is far from having been won. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people are still victims of discrimination and violence of every kind, without benefiting from appropriate protection. This situation must end. We appeal to

countries that still criminalize homosexuality to agree to review their legislation and offer appropriate protection, notably by punishing perpetrators of violence against homosexuals.

Ladies and gentlemen,

France welcomes the work being done by the OSCE. I wish to commend the activities of the ODIHR, particularly the department in charge of tolerance issues and the Roma and Sinti Contact Point. France considers that the participating States should co-operate closely with the ODIHR, while respecting its autonomy. The quality and relevance of its work are undeniable. I also commend the three Personal Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office for tolerance and non-discrimination, whose work constitutes a valuable supplement to the efforts of the ODIHR.

We should like these activities to be vigorously pursued.

France welcomes the decision on combating hate crimes adopted by the Ministerial Council in Athens last December. Hate crimes are unacceptable affronts to human dignity which must be relentlessly combated.

Mr. Chairperson,

I hope that the deliberations of this Conference will be fruitful and permit a true exchange of ideas. I welcome the fact that representatives of civil society are participating and can thus give us their suggestions and inform us of their expectations. In conclusion, I should like to express the hope that the Conference will make a real contribution to the struggle against all forms of discrimination and to the promotion of tolerance.