



**Statement by  
OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights**

**Plenary Session 2: Combating Intolerance  
and Discrimination against Muslims**

**OSCE Conference on Combating Discrimination and  
Promoting Mutual Respect and Understanding**

**Bucharest, 07 June 2007**

Excellencies, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

This session on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims provides an important opportunity to review and assess the implementation of OSCE commitments and progress made since the last high-level conference in Cordoba in 2005.

The first specific OSCE commitment to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims was made in 2002. Since then, every year, specific decisions on tolerance and non-discrimination (which explicitly highlight the need to combat intolerance against Muslims) have been adopted, further committing OSCE participating States to intensify their actions through the development of educational and awareness-raising measures, as well as increased efforts to collect and maintain reliable data on hate crimes.

Substantial declarations and commitments to address intolerance against Muslims were also made at OSCE high-level conferences. This session marks the second time that the OSCE has had a high-level discussion specifically on the issue of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. Additionally, this year, for the first time, a Chairmanship Conference will be held which will focus especially on this topic. Unfortunately, this increased awareness goes in parallel with continuing acts of violence and intolerance against Muslim communities which have included anti-Muslim discourse and biased portrayals in the media, lack of religious accommodation in workplaces or schools, as well as violent attacks on individuals and their places of worship.

Hate-motivated incidents against Muslims are driven by a combination of racism, xenophobia and religious intolerance, specifically hostility towards Islam and its adherents. In the ODIHR's efforts to closely follow incidents of intolerance against Muslim communities, we have seen several distinct trends with regard to intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, including a continuing trend of anti-immigrant sentiment, fuelled by populist rhetoric and biased media portrayals. An overarching trend in many OSCE participating States in recent years has been a retreat from multicultural policies founded upon the principle of respect for diversity, in favour of policies and measures that restrict religious/cultural expression. The ongoing fight against terrorism, which has led to an association of terrorism with Muslims and Islam, has also contributed to increasing anti-Muslim sentiment across the OSCE region. Another observable trend has been the profiling of Muslims (or those perceived to be Muslim) by law enforcement and/or security personnel which has included targeted security checks and official calls to introduce passenger profiling based on ethnicity and religion.

Incidents motivated by anti-Muslim bias are particularly under-reported. An analysis of official hate crime statistics submitted to the ODIHR by participating States has shown that while some states do record hate crimes motivated by racism and/or anti-Semitism, there is a lack of available official data on religiously motivated crimes in general, and anti-Muslim hate crimes in particular. Unofficial data is also largely unavailable, since there are few NGOs currently monitoring, recording and reporting incidents motivated by anti-Muslim bias. The risk is that the full scale and extent of hate crimes against Muslims remains obscured. The situation is further compounded by the tendency toward under-reporting by Muslim communities, which can be attributed to a distrust of law enforcement authorities and the criminal justice system in general, particularly in light of the fight against terrorism.

Anti-Muslim rhetoric has become increasingly acceptable: it has moved from the far-right of the political spectrum to the mainstream. Anti-Muslim discourse makes reference to terrorism, violence and oppression; the use of terminology such as “Islamic terrorist” have continued to perpetuate the association of terrorism with Islam. Anti-Muslim sentiment in political discourse is also often driven by and reflective of powerful anti-immigrant sentiment.

In order to provide assistance to OSCE States in their efforts to respond effectively and appropriately to these new challenges, the ODIHR organized in May 2006 an *issue-specific* roundtable on the *Representation of Muslims in Media and Political Discourse*. The key finding of this event was that the reality of Muslims’ diverse ways of life, ways of thinking and worldviews, and their problems and social backgrounds, find no or little reflection in the public discourse and in the media.

As a direct follow-up to some of the roundtable's recommendations, the ODIHR together with an advisory panel comprised of academics, journalists/media experts and NGOs, is now developing a series of customised handbooks on Muslim communities in four OSCE participating States. The handbooks are intended as a reference resource for policy makers, public officials, educators and working journalists and will contain short essays on different aspects of Islam and Muslim life and culture; statistics; a glossary of terminology; relevant links and a comprehensive directory of contacts. The first handbook for Spain will be launched later this year at the Chairmanship Conference in Cordoba in October.

I would like to thank Ambassador Ömür Orhun, the OSCE Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims for his ongoing efforts to co-operate and co-ordinate with the ODIHR. He has played an important role in his efforts to highlight issues of key importance, promote good practices and urge states to implement their commitments in tackling discrimination against Muslims.

Finally, I would like to reiterate the ODIHR's willingness to support OSCE States and civil society organizations in their efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, be it through the provision of a forum in which to raise and follow-up issues, or through joint co-operation on concrete projects.

Thank you.