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OSCE HIGH LEVEL MEETING ON VICTIMS OF TERRORISM
Vienna, 13-14 September
Session I: The Victim
Statement by the Permanent Mission of Portugal

Chairman,

First I would like to congratulate the Chairmanship-in-Office for organizing a High Level event on a matter as important as the one that gathers us here today and to welcome Mr. Josep Borrell, Special Envoy of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

Terrorism recognises no borders. It is an ever-present threat to all States and peoples. As we are painfully reminded by each and every violent act that indiscriminately targets the innocent, terrorism threatens both our security and the rights and freedoms of our citizens.

Portugal condemns all acts of terrorism as criminal and unjustifiable, irrespective of their forms and manifestations. My country is committed to intensifying a worldwide effort in the fight against terrorism in all its dimensions: be it by strongly supporting the leading role of the United Nations in mobilising the international community; or by reinforcing international and regional cooperation through complementary partnerships.

Global problems require global responses. Therefore, international cooperation is an indispensable tool efficiently to combat terrorism. We must continue to improve our cooperation at national, regional and multilateral levels in order to combat this scourge vigorously. Regional organisations can play a valuable role in implementing global strategies, action plans and goals. The OSCE is a good example of how regional and concerted efforts can contribute to the promotion of shared interests.

Chairman,

Curbing the scourge of terrorism requires multiple articulated efforts on numerous fronts. These include: harmonizing legal frameworks with international conventions, cooperation between police and security agencies, capacity and institution building; exchange of information and intelligence sharing; “solving unsolved conflicts”; promoting good governance, the rule of law, human rights and democratic values; targeting inequalities and discrimination; strengthening dialogue and promoting understanding between cultures, as is the objective of the Alliance of Civilisations.

Anti-terrorism measures must comply with our obligations under international law, in particular international human rights law, refugee law and humanitarian law. Effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights are not conflicting but rather complementing and mutually reinforcing goals.

The OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security enables it to provide a special contribution in many of the fields I have just mentioned. It is also suited to discuss the phenomenon of terrorism from the perspective of the human rights of victims.

Last year, the General Assembly unanimously adopted a UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, in which States pledged to “promote international solidarity in support of victims and foster the involvement of civil society in a global campaign against terrorism and its condemnation”.

The specific issue of victims of terrorism is a complex and sensitive problem, which can be approached from many different angles. Portugal commends the event’s organisers on the topics selected for each of the working sessions. They clearly reflect the objectives and priorities identified in the framework of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the UN Working Group on “Supporting and Highlighting Victims of Terrorism”.

When talking of victims (session I), we should be aware that victims of terrorism span all religions, nationalities and ethnic groups. Many times, perpetrators and victims of a terrorist act share the same language, ethnicity, race, religion, and culture. Therefore, an increased focus on the victims of terrorism may be an important means of dissuading people from resorting to or supporting terrorism. It may also serve to foster a larger and widespread spirit of solidarity between peoples and societies across the globe.

Assistance to victims (session II) remains primarily a responsibility of each individual State, namely in what concerns emergency assistance and managing and minimising the consequences of a terrorist attack. However, responsibility need not mean exclusivity. There is much to be gained from public and private partnerships and the involvement of non-state actors. Moreover, the “global and trans-national nature” of the terrorist threat begs a “global and trans-national spirit of solidarity”, based upon which state and non-state actors may share experiences and best practices; provide mutually reinforcing assistance both within and across border; and respond more effectively to the needs of victims.

Legislative Frameworks and Legal Proceedings (session III) vary across the board. Often, criminal and judicial proceedings are geared towards bringing the perpetrators of terrorist acts to justice. Increasingly so, legal proceedings should also seek to ensure the rights of victims. We believe this to be an area where OSCE Participating States can learn from each other by comparing different systems and exchanging best practices.

Notwithstanding the irrefutable responsibility of each and every State to protect and assist its citizens, the challenge is daunting. Civil Society (session IV) can play an important complementary role in counter-terrorism related efforts. NGOs and civic associations can provide support in lobbying, devising policy, developing networks and implementing services and action plans. Together, participating States and civil society should look into ways of

facilitating interaction and building solidarity between victims of terrorism, States, the international community and civil society.

Chairman,

Portugal looks forward to a fruitful and open discussion and is certain that this High Level event will represent an important step towards ensuring that the voices and needs of victims of terrorism are increasingly heard.

In conclusion, Portugal would like to reassure you of its readiness to continue engaging in a constructive spirit of cooperation with participating States, thus reinforcing the OSCE's contribution to the global fight against terror.