

*OSCE TOLERANCE IMPLEMENTATION MEETING ON PROMOTING INTER-
CULTURAL, INTER-RELIGIOUS AND INTER-ETHNIC UNDERSTANDING
(Almaty, 12-13 June 2006)
FIRST SESSION*

**STATEMENT BY AMBASSADOR YUSUF BULUÇ, PERMANENT
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“A NEW DIALOGUE WITH A PURPOSE”

Mr. Chairman,

I should like to start by joining previous speakers in expressing our appreciation to the Kazakh Government for hosting this meeting in Almaty with an exemplary hospitality and professionalism. It was gracious of H.E. Mr. Nursultan Nazarbayev to address the meeting as the President of a state which prides itself for multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious mosaic that it is.

Almaty is accustomed to being the venue of many similar events. In many of them my country's representatives have actively participated. Our Kazakh colleagues in the best of their traditions presented their well-deserved credentials to host this tolerance implementation meeting.

Mr. Chairman,

Indeed, this is an **implementation meeting**. This specific objective should define the thrust and content of our deliberations. So far we have made numerous political declarations and have taken a series of decisions to promote tolerance, mutual respect and understanding and to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination both in our societies and in the entire OSCE region. Our governments undertook to attain such promotion through the enactment of legislation and through its enforcement. For the first time we have set out to review to what extent we were able to mobilize this declared political will into action and implementation.

In anticipating further into our meeting, many of us will present a glorious track record consisting of advancement and achievements in implementing our commitments. Had that been the case, neither would there have been a requirement to holding this meeting, while infinitely happy to be in Almaty, nor would we have witnessed the disturbing events that have taken place earlier this year, widely but somewhat misleadingly labeled as “**the cartoon crisis**”. While we should be prepared to commend good practices and seek to emulate them with a forward looking approach, we also need to draw **lessons** from such crises. We may offer a variety of comments regarding the responses at the individual national level. At a collective level, I dare say, this latest episode has proven our Organization incapable of forging a collective political will for prompt and concerted action at least to put the OSCE on the map of concerned players internationally. The physical manifestations of the crisis may have subsided but the event like many of its predecessors will have fed into a foundation rendering it more unstable and fragile.

Dialogue and partnership should provide the means by which we identify common strategies to address our common problems. We regard this endeavor as **a rational and pragmatic policy choice** in order to ensure that future generations live in security, peace and harmony. We are cognizant of the fact that in a global world, merely national effort would render insufficient results to address global challenges.

The concept of inter-cultural and inter-faith dialogue and reconciliation is as old as the history of conflicts within and between societies. Numerous initiatives have already been taken at all levels. However, by simply observing the events as they unfold one arrives at the conclusion that either the existing mechanisms for dialogue are inadequate and unsatisfactory to meet contemporary challenges to diverse societies in a pluralistic world or the substance we transact through such mechanisms are not the most suitable. To get it right, let me highlight that one of the most pressing challenges is **the growing prejudice, misperceptions and polarization between the West and the Islamic world which feeds into the vicious circle of extremism, violence and further polarization**. This new predicament requires a fresh look at how we can improve the existing concepts and structures of dialogue by building on them rather than through an attempt at their recreation.

Mr. Chairman,

The central premise upon which dialogue and partnership needs to be built should be equality of parties and mutual recognition that their respective cultures and value-systems do not have an exclusive claim to civility and that they are capable of learning from and about each other's moral traditions and ways of life. The new type of dialogue should be **an exercise of understanding not one of persuasion!** It requires open-mindedness on all sides and sincere effort to make unbiased analyses of the challenges we face.

The new concept of dialogue and partnership should also **engage the other voices** that are sometimes ignored or excluded but can play significant roles in our societies as youth leaders, heads of NGOs, intellectuals or political activists. At the national level, we observe a growing tendency towards tokenism. Identifying the right interlocutors to represent diverse communities is a challenge. However, the real impact of dialogue can be achieved at the community level only through and with genuine, not token, representatives. **Participation in public life and decision-making by all** without discrimination seems to be the key to resolving differences and to identifying solutions which bolster social and political consensus.

Dialogue and partnership, both at the national and international levels, should generate the kind of knowledge and political language which will enable us to break the vicious circle and counter the growing trend of racist, xenophobic and discriminatory discourse in politics and in the media. The urgent task in front of us is to lay the groundwork for formulating **a coherent and compelling new intellectual and political agenda**.

Mr. Chairman,

Needless to say, **political leadership** is required to set the agenda of the dialogue and diligently pursue the implementation of its results and recommendations. On the other hand, civil society and international agencies should also assume responsibility and mobilize their resources to lay out strategies for changing the terms of predominant public and political discourse.

The OSCE, as a platform for political dialogue, is well-placed to lead this new strategic thinking. After a period of inaction and confusion, we hope that this meeting will pave the way for a clear understanding of the challenges posed by cultural and religious diversity and for **a coherent and determined OSCE approach** to meet them. At this first meeting of its kind, one that focuses on implementation, let us rededicate ourselves not ceremonially but substantively to the task of pursuing “**a new dialogue with a purpose**”, one that seeks to achieve “zero tolerance to intolerance”. This is no mean task.

Thank you.