



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, H.E. Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu

As delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
November 29, 2012

The United States warmly welcomes the Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to the Permanent Council and thanks him for his address. Dr. Ihsanoglu, we appreciate your interest in the OSCE and your productive contributions to past OSCE conferences on combating intolerance.

We agree with you that intolerance and discrimination pose serious threats to interfaith harmony. Combating them requires the coordinated efforts of the OSCE, OIC, and other international organizations, as well as governments worldwide, as outlined in UN Human Rights Council Resolution 16/18. We are deeply disturbed by the targeting of members of religious minorities and outbreaks of inter-religious violence all around the world. These worrying developments demonstrate the need for the international community to take concerted action to challenge stereotyping, discrimination, and violence motivated by racial or religious hatred with the action-oriented approach detailed in Resolution 16/18 that combats these evils without limiting the freedoms of expression and religion.

As demonstrated in Resolution 16/18, governments have at their disposal many tools to address intolerance, including education, inter-religious dialogue, and legal protections against discrimination and hate crimes – but they need to implement them. It is the duty of all governments to protect the ability of every individual to profess and practice his or her own faith. The United States remains committed to working with governments around the world to promote mutual understanding and respect of human rights, including religious freedom and freedom of expression. That is why we have been working with the OIC, the EU, and other international partners to promote implementation of Resolution 16/18. Our success will be dependent on the quality, impact, and sustainability of the partnerships we build together. This is the essence of mutual responsibility, which will lay the foundation for lasting security and stability in all our countries.

Dr. Ihsanoglu, the United States remains fully committed to Middle East peace, as President Obama reiterated on his November 11 call with President Abbas. The United States' strong commitment to Middle East peace, as well as the investments we continue to make in the Palestinian people over the years, have helped sustain the Palestinian Authority and provided education, health care, and security to Palestinians throughout the region.

Notwithstanding this support, the United States strongly opposes Palestinian efforts to pursue an UNGA resolution to upgrade their status to non-member observer state at the UNGA. Such a counterproductive course of action not only places U.S assistance to the Palestinian

Authority at risk, but would damage Palestinian relations with the U.S., risk a damaging response by the Israelis, jeopardize U.S. and others' multilateral interests throughout the UN, and make it much more difficult to resume peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians. Moreover, enhanced status at the UN will in no way improve the actual situation for the Palestinian people on the ground.

The Palestinian course of action will not produce the results they claim to seek - a functioning, independent state living at peace with Israel. A Palestinian state with all the attributes of statehood can only be achieved through direct negotiations between the parties.

Dr. Ihsanoglu, we deeply appreciate your comments regarding the upcoming transition in Afghanistan and reiterate our strong support for the people and government of Afghanistan. We share your confidence that the "Heart of Asia" process will continue to be a foundation for enhanced cooperation and confidence in the region. We also share your concerns about the Syrian regime's brutality as it clings to power. Reports earlier this week of the regime resorting to shelling a refugee camp near the Turkish border, as well as the deadly airstrikes on the Dar el-Shifa hospital near Aleppo illustrate this brutality. We strongly condemn the regime's continuing violence against protected civilians and hospitals. As we see these horrifying reports of government forces attacking unarmed civilians, we continue to emphasize that those responsible for unlawful killings and other violations of international law will be identified and held accountable. We encourage the work of the UN Commission of Inquiry, which has been collecting information that we hope can lay the groundwork for accountability efforts. We also support the work of the Syrian Justice and Accountability Center, which has similar goals.

Thank you, Dr. Ihsanoglu, for your appearance here today. We wish you all success in your important work.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.