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UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations

Jorge Sampaio

**OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP CONFERENCE ON INTOLERANCE AND
DISCRIMINATION AGAINST MUSLIMS**

Talking points

Cordoba,

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Mr. Miguel Moratinos, OSCE Chairman-in Office and Minister of Foreign Affairs and Co-operation of Spain,

Mr. Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, OSCE Secretary General

Mr Amr Moussa, Secretary General of the Arab League

Mr. Manuel Chaves, President of the Junta de Andalucía

Ms. Rosa Aguilar Mayoress of Cordoba

Excellencies,

Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- First of all, let me convey to you, on behalf of His Excellency the Secretary General of the United Nations, Mr Ban ki moon, his warmest greetings, and deep appreciation for the invaluable work carried out by the OSCE.
- For my part, in my capacity as the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations, I am very grateful to the Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE for giving me the opportunity to address this distinguished audience.
- This Conference on “Intolerance and Discrimination Against Muslims” focus on a topical and central, although very complex, issue.
- Let’s face it bluntly: for no good reason, at the present time, there is a social anxiety toward Islam and Muslim cultures largely ingrained.
- Therefore, Islamophobia tends to become an ordinary and banal feature of our societies, particularly in Europe and in America.

- There is a lot of evidence to support this allegation. For instance, the EUMC (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia) gathered data over the last few years indicating that since the September 11, European Muslims have been seriously affected by an increasingly hostile social climate.
- But on the other hand, from a wider viewpoint, one has to be cautious because our globalizing world is by no means a world of static and rigid dualities. We simply can not ignore that when speaking about “Muslims”, about the “Islam” or even about the “West”, we are not referring to a monolith but to a mosaic of communities, as my good friend Vartan Gregorian puts it.
- Indeed, discussions on words do not solve problems; but using inaccurate concepts is often part of the difficulties and prevents from sorting out effective solutions to practical problems.
- I underscore this point because it helps to understand that cultural and religious fault lines do not only oppose the so-called “West” against the “Islam”, but divide all our mixed and interconnected societies. On the one other hand, we need to move beyond facile stereotypes, simplistic dichotomies and ready-made images, which fuel social anxiety towards Islam and Muslim cultures.
- Let me also add that intolerance and discrimination attitudes exist within Muslim societies, let alone between different Islamic communities.
- Anyway, in my view, intolerance, discrimination and xenophobia need to be tackled in all OSCE countries without exception, namely in accordance with the principles enshrined in the decision n° 6 of the 2002 Porto Ministerial Council meeting or 2004 Permanent Council Decision n° 621.
- The OSCE is well positioned to address Islamophobia issues for three main reasons. Firstly, it encompasses West as well as Muslim countries; secondly, it intends to be a forum for political dialogue; and thirdly, because it includes among its three main priorities, the so called “human dimension” aimed to ensure full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, to promote the principles of democracy and rule of law, and to promote tolerance throughout the OSCE region.

- As all OSCE members are committed to achieve these goals, I believe that this region could pioneer a renewed approach to counter the development of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims.
- Indeed, some results-oriented policies should be implemented on a number of areas, including education, employment, youth, the role of media and the support of civil society.
- To build pluralistic and inclusive societies, where the rights of individuals and of minorities are protected, extra urgent action is required to bridge the existing fault lines that divide our communities.
- Appropriate and timely policies can prevent social anxieties from mounting as well as fears, which lead to anger, and breed violence.
- The greatest single antidote to violence is dialogue, conversation and debate – speaking our fears, listening to the fears of others, sharing vulnerabilities, building room for constructive dissent and deepening mutual understanding and trust.
- The accelerating pace of globalization brings individuals and societies closer together than ever before, interconnecting lives and identities in inextricable ways. But fear of homogenization and of losing identity also creates regressions and tends to bring new tribalism.
- As Edward W. Said put it one day, very often people return to comfortable symbols of the past only to affirm an identity that resists against global homogenization, in order to defend themselves against the sense of an all-encompassing global atmosphere.
- Indeed, historical context and legacy are of great importance to shape identity and sense of patriotism, but people's life can not be frozen in the past, it must go on.

- In this regard, I do not resist recalling a clip from a conversation that Edward W. said had with Daniel Barenboim at the turning of the century on the meaning of homeland and homesickness as well as on the vexed question of identity.
- Coming both from a complex overlapping of cultures, and because of the hazards of their lives in a time of often forced itinerancy and mobility, they eventually agreed that the “sense of identity is a set of currents, flowing currents, rather than a fixed place or a stable set of objects”.
- This way of formulating the question of what an identity consists of is probably very personal and indeed quite provocative. But it helps to make the case for building open and pluralistic identities, free from the burden of possessions, memorabilia and reminiscences from the past which fuels national conflicts and identities as well as xenophobia.

Excellencies

- To conclude my remarks, let me raise the question – I guess - you have all in mind: How can the Alliance of Civilizations help to counter intolerance and discrimination against Muslims? What is it for?
- Three points on this regard.
- Firstly, the Alliance of Civilizations is a United Nations initiative with a global scope and perspective, though mainly focused on the issue of relations and tensions between Muslim and Western societies as they are unique among cross-cultural conflicts in the world today in that they threaten stability globally. This means that the Alliance is not echoing the dark prediction of the clash of civilizations, but takes it as a serious threat unless positive political action is taken to avoid cultural and religious fault lines developing within and between our societies.
- Secondly, the Alliance of Civilizations counts very much on the strong political leverage of its Group of Friends, a community made up of States and international organizations and bodies. This is why I have met with the Alliance’s Group of Friends members in New York, some days ago and have

asked them to make commitments in order to turn our global challenge into “glocal” deliverables.

- I have made a set of suggestions - to international organizations and bodies, I have suggested to develop Charters for partnering with the Alliance; I called on countries to develop “National Strategy for cross-cultural dialogue”; and I have asked both to appoint “Coordinators”, responsible for the implementation of the charts and of the national strategies as well as to serve as focal points in the relations with the Alliance’s Secretariat and other partners.
- Finally, I have urged them to take advantage of the first annual Forum of the Alliance, which will be held next January, in Madrid, to make a major step forward and present to the public opinion commitments and deliverables in line with those suggestions.
- In this regard, I count very much on your support and the Alliance looks forward to working with the OSCE to achieve these goals.
- Third and last remark. Let me emphasize that there is no point for the Alliance in competing with the OSCE or with any other international organization, let alone in repeating your outstanding work.
- It is my firm belief that the Alliance can bring added-value to your work, but it can not act as a substitute for you. As an expression of a renewed political will to place high on the global agenda the problem of reducing cross-cultural tensions between peoples and communities, the Alliance can help creating political momentum and scale up global and coordinated efforts.
- The Alliance can also serve as a catalyst for pilot initiatives to be conducted in partnership across nations and/or regions as well as between different international or regional organizations and bodies.
- In building cross-cultural understanding and in improving intercultural and interreligious relations among communities - matters the Alliance grapples with - there are no unilateral solutions nor is there any place for isolated positions.

- We need shared policies creating strong solidarity links between all partners and to engage coordinated action in order to build bridges of respect and better understanding between peoples and communities.
- This is why I will finish my address by calling upon all countries here represented to join the Alliance and by urging the OSCE to use its clout to help State members to design their “National Strategy for cross-cultural dialogue”.

Many thanks