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Address by Ambassador Adil Akhmetov

**Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on
Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims**

**The OSCE Permanent Council
Vienna, 7 November, 2013**

Mr Chairperson!
Your Excellencies!

From the outset I would like to express my gratitude to the Ukrainian Chairmanship and the OSCE Permanent Council for the opportunity to participate in this high level meeting and present my annual as well as the final report related to my mandate.

Ladies and Gentlemen! The main focus of my specific mandate has been to raise awareness of the governments of the OSCE participating states on intolerance and discrimination against Muslims as this phenomenon is a serious threat to democracy and human rights across the OSCE region.

Since my appointment to the mandate by the OSCE Greek Chairperson-in-Office in June 2009 I have been delivering speeches on intolerance and discrimination against Muslims at various forums, including the third and fourth Astana Congresses of the leaders of world and traditional religions, inter-religious and inter-cultural conferences held in Krakow, Geneva, Warsaw, Prague and Vienna as well as specific round tables held in different parts of the OSCE region.

With the same purpose I have paid separate and joint visits to 17 OSCE member states and the European Union Institutions in Brussels. The results of the visits were timely reported to the annual OSCE Permanent Council meetings.

Within the current year I have participated with presentations in the 5th Global Forum of the UN Alliance of Civilizations in Vienna and the roundtable meeting “Challenging anti-Muslim Prejudice and Promotion of Mutual Understanding in Multicultural Societies through Education” held in Strasbourg and together with my colleagues have paid joint visits to Belgium and Greece and participated in the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw and the Human Dimension Committee conference in Vienna.

So far intolerance and discrimination against Muslims still remain a challenge to stability, democracy and human rights across the OSCE region.

With the view of responding to this challenge, since 2002, the OSCE participating States have adopted a range of commitments to combat manifestations of intolerance and discrimination such as:

1. Taking measures to respond to and prevent acts of violence and discrimination against Muslims;
2. Rejecting association of terrorism and violent extremism with any particular religion;
3. Fostering mutual understanding and respect through educational activities to fight prejudice against Muslims.

However, despite the efforts of the participating States, there is a strong need for more comprehensive and long-term policies and strategies to counter this specific form of intolerance and discrimination.

In this regard, I would like to draw your attention to hate crimes against Muslims and the context in which these attacks take place, as this is one of the core areas of the OSCE’s mandate.

Anti-Muslim hate crimes are under-reported and under-recorded

As the ODIHR's draft annual report on Hate Crimes for 2012 reveals, there is still little reliable official or unofficial statistical information on hate crimes motivated by anti-Muslim bias. Although 20 participating States informed the ODIHR that they collect data on anti-Muslim hate crimes, only Austria and Sweden submitted figures on such crimes and only Austria provided information on an incident which took place last year.

We know that Canada and the United States also collect statistical data on Islamophobic incidents but during the drafting period of 2012 ODIHR report, their data were not available.

Unofficial data on hate crimes against Muslims are also very limited. Only 20 NGOs from 13 participating States have provided the ODIHR's upcoming report with such information on such crimes. Accordingly the lack of reliable and comprehensive information or absence of data on the phenomenon that is predominant throughout the OSCE region is a great concern to us as it is hardly possible for governments to develop effective strategies related to this issue and respond to the security needs of all citizens.

Barriers to report and investigate hate crimes against Muslims

During the country visits accomplished within the last five years I have identified definite answers for the question why the Muslim communities often refrain from reporting on hate crimes committed against them to the police:

1. The victims of anti-Muslim hate crimes tend not to report, because they do not trust in law enforcement officers.
2. They are sometimes afraid of being victimized by the police officers or they fear that there might be retaliations in case that their identities are disclosed.
3. Many victims have also the perception that their complaints will be ignored because prejudices against Muslims are prevalent among the law enforcement officers.
4. The participating States lack targeted policies to enhance the capacity of their law enforcement officers to combat this specific type of hate crime.
5. There are very few States which offer training for the police to counter anti-Muslim prejudice and increase their skills to co-operate with Muslim communities.
6. The majority of states do not disaggregate data, and do not specifically record hate crimes against Muslims.
7. There are not enough civil society organizations that are equipped to monitor, report and respond to hate crimes against Muslims.

Although the states bear the primary responsibility for addressing hate crimes, civil society organizations should also play their adequate role, because they are close to vulnerable communities. However, Muslim community-based organizations and civil society initiatives receive very little support from their governments in the area of hate crime prevention and response.

Hate Crimes in Context and recommendations:

There is another aspect of the problem which is even more complex to grasp and tackle. That is the political and social environment where hate crimes take place. While acknowledging the centrality of respecting freedom of expression, the OSCE participating States have acknowledged the leading role of the political figures and the media in combating intolerance and discrimination. However, there is too little leadership from the political sphere and the media when Muslims were subject to assaults or Muslim property was desecrated or deteriorated. Even

worse, there are some media and some political parties which use anti-Muslim rhetoric with a view to gain more attention or to attract more votes.

The role of education

Only education can play a positive role in deconstructing stereotypes against Muslims. In conformity with this approach, OSCE participating States have adopted a range of commitments in order to devise comprehensive educational policies and strategies to promote tolerance in general and specifically to counter anti-Muslim prejudice. They have also encouraged national educational authorities to rely on the ODIHR's experience in the field of tolerance education.

Together with the UNESCO and the Council of Europe, the ODIHR developed a user-friendly guidebook to assist educators in identifying manifestations of intolerance against Muslims and providing suggestions on how to challenge such stereotypes in school context. Now, the participating States need to co-operate with ODIHR to organize public events to raise awareness of this tool among teachers.

On the other hand the Participating States should send a clear message to the society, by eliminating all practices and policies which may directly or indirectly discriminate against Muslims.

In this regard, special attention should be paid to the enforcement of counter-terrorism policies. While recognizing the reality of terrorist threats and the legitimate right of states to ensure security of their citizens, it shall not be forgotten that counter-terrorist measures should be designed and enforced in the framework of human rights protection. We have witnessed that racial profiling measures such as stop and search have not only violated the rights of Muslims but also reinforced stereotypes against those groups that may look like Muslims.

The participating States should also ensure that freedom of religion or belief is protected for everyone, without any discrimination based on religion. For this reason, governments should refrain from intervening in the religious matters of Muslims, in particular, in relation to the election of their religious leaders and appointment of imams. They should also guarantee that any restriction to the manifestation of religion or belief, including wearing of headscarf, does not lead to direct or indirect discrimination. The issues concerning access to places of worship should be resolved in accordance with the established international human rights standards and in a broad consultation with the affected communities.

The participating states should take combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims as an essential element of their commitment to protect human rights and promote democratic values.

Within this framework, I would like to make also the following recommendations:

The participating States should enhance their efforts to improve co-operation between law enforcement officers and Muslim communities to combat hate crimes. With the view to bring more political attention to this issue, I would suggest to the upcoming Chairperson-in-Office, together with the ODIHR to hold a high level meeting to identify challenges and lessons learned in strengthening law enforcement-community co-operation to combat hate crimes against Muslims;

The participating States should also devise awareness raising and training activities to reduce prejudice against Muslims within the security sector and rely on the ODIHR's expertise in the field of training of law enforcement officers and teaching about intolerance and stereotypes.

The participating States should politically and financially support civil society initiatives to report, respond to and prevent hate crimes against Muslims. Since 2011, the ODIHR has provided training seminars for NGOs on hate crimes against Muslims in a number of countries, including Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany and Spain. These training workshops should continue;

The participating States from all parts of the OSCE region should request the assistance of the ODIHR in reviewing the new legislative initiatives which may have an impact on freedom of religion or belief;

And finally, the participating States should support the ODIHR's activities in combating intolerance and discrimination against Muslims through extrabudgetary contributions.

In conclusion I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the OSCE Current Chairperson in Office as well as the previous OSCE Chairpersons, the Members of the OSCE Permanent Council, the OSCE Parliament Assembly Members, the OSCE PA Secretariat, the ODIHR for the trust, concrete support and the warmest cooperation during the last five years!

Thank you for your attention!

I. Overview of Main Activities in 2013

1. On February 21-22, 2013 I participated in the 12th Winter Meeting of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Vienna as a member of the Kazakhstan delegation and made presentations in the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Reform and in the General Committee on Democracy, Human Rights and Humanitarian Questions.
2. On February 21, 2013 I attended a Co-ordination meeting with the OSCE Chairmanship and the ODIHR in Vienna. The ODIHR officers acquainted me with the scope of my mandate as the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims. The mandate presumes promotion of better coordination of participating States' efforts, exactly, in full and effective implementation of the OSCE Ministerial and Permanent Council's relevant decisions on intolerance and discrimination, and cooperation with the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE on struggle against intolerance.
3. On February 26-28, 2013 I participated in the 5th Global Forum of the UNAOC held in Vienna and made a report on "Regional focus on Central Asia".
4. On March 19, 2013 I participated in the International conference "Freedom of religions in Kazakhstan" in Astana, where I made a presentation on "Political and legal aspects of freedom of religions".
5. On April 14-15, 2013 I attended the Bureau Meeting in Copenhagen and participated in the Ad Hoc Committee on Transparency and Reform of the OSCE.
6. On 7 May, 2013 I participated in the roundtable on inter-religious dialogue in promoting freedom of religion or belief held in Vienna organized jointly by the Ukrainian OSCE Chairmanship, OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights and the European Council of Religious Leaders.

7. On June 10-12, 2013 we the three Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairperson-in-office on Combating intolerance and discrimination against Jews, Christians and Muslims paid a country visit to Belgium.
8. On June 29-30, 2013 I participated in the OSCE PA's 22nd Annual Session "Helsinki +40" in Istanbul.
9. On 5 July, 2013 I participated in the roundtable on "Challenging Anti-Muslim Prejudice and Promotion of Mutual Understanding in Multicultural Societies through Education" in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg.
10. On 23 August, 2013 I participated in the International Conference "Global Ethics: We Save Planet Earth" in Astana where I made a presentation.
11. On 3 September, 2013 I participated in the 2013 OSCE Central Asian Youth Network Seminar "The Pendulum Swings: Empowering the CA Youth against Violent Extremism" in Astana where I also made a presentation.
12. On 18-20 September, 2013 we, the three PRs of the OSCE CiO on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination Against Muslims, Jews and Christians paid a joint country visit to Greece.
13. On 8 October, 2013 we, the three PRs of the OSCE CiO on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination Against Muslims, Jews and Christians took part in the Human Dimension Committee conference in Vienna.