

**Statement of OSCE CiO Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance
and Discrimination against Muslims Ambassador Adil Akhmetov
HDIM, Warsaw, October 4, 2011**

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express appreciation of the good work of NGOs to counter intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, and mention increasing co-operation between ODIHR and civil society in this area, especially ODIHR's NGO training on hate crimes against Muslims.

I encourage governmental officials to engage with Muslim community-based organizations and NGOs to address the challenge of Islamophobia. At this point I firmly condemn the Oslo massacre, as an example of how far anti-Muslim hatred can go, and damage the whole society.

In this connection I urge governmental authorities take all necessary steps in order to protect Muslim communities, and this should include paying more attention on Islamophobic terrorism.

On the other hand the need for challenging manifestations of anti-Muslim hatred in political discourse and in the media, including the new media (internet, facebook and other social media) is growing.

I would like to remind that a High Level OSCE Conference on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims will take place on 28 October in Vienna, and will be a good opportunity to discuss how to counter expression of anti-Muslim prejudices while respecting freedom of expression.

In this connection I encourage ODIHR to support participating States and civil society in these efforts, especially by collecting and disseminating information on good practices and providing guidelines.

At the same time I express concern over recent legislative initiatives to limit the visibility of Muslims in Europe, as this gives a very bad message to the society and leads to the accusation of victims in the cases of attacks on mosques and Muslim women with headscarf, and remind that participating States' integration of immigrants does not necessitate their assimilation. There should be no hierarchy between cultures.

I also encourage governments to raise awareness of Muslim cultures as part of European cultures and increase the appreciation of their contributions, through educational campaigns, and underline the fact that the gender aspect of Islamophobia needs more attention, as this remains one of the major obstacles for some Muslim women to realize their own potentials.

Concluding my speech I congratulate ODIHR, together with UNESCO and Council of Europe, on their joint work to produce a guidebook for educators on countering intolerance against Muslims, and strongly encourage all participating States to make use of this new tool which will be published very soon.

Thank you.