

Address by Ambassador Adil Akhmetov
Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office on
Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims

The Human Dimension Implementation Meeting -2012
WS14

Express concern over the recent incidents

- Ladies and Gentlemen! First of all, I would like to draw your attention to an unavoidable common concern related with the state of intercultural, interreligious, and international PEACE on the planet. There is no doubt that today it is extremely fragile. The latest worldwide Muslim anger and violent protests inspired by a You Tube brutal film mocking Prophet Muhammad is a strong proof of what I have just said. Moreover this is not a single case of scoffing at sacred feelings of Muslims on the planet. Besides the mankind has not yet forgotten those malicious and unforgivable ridicules thrown at Islam in the past. I mean the cartoon films humiliating Prophet Muhammad and several other cases of vandalism committed by extremists against Koran in the OSCE region. This type of hate crimes and provocative behavior purposely insulting Islam should not be justified by freedom of expression. Instead such harmful inhuman and stereotyped mindset ought to be severely condemned by the OSCE member states.
- Emphasize that nothing, including the abuse of freedom of expression in order to insult Muslims and Islam, can justify the killing of innocent people.
- However, as these recent incidents once more remind us, the right to freedom of expression must be exercised in a responsible way
- Appreciate that many government representatives and political leaders condemned the movie and spoke up against insulting the religious feelings of Muslims

- Nonetheless there is a need for more coordinated and systematic efforts to counter stereotyping and bigotry in public discourse.

OSCE Commitments to Combat Intolerance against Muslims

- The OSCE recognized the danger of growing public intolerance and discrimination against Muslims as early as 2002, in a Ministerial Council decision which firmly condemned such acts of discrimination.
- This Ministerial Council Decision has been expanded on in a number of commitments, which condemn acts of discrimination and violence against Muslims, reject association of terrorism with any particular religion or culture, and call for increased awareness-raising measures to prevent intolerance and discrimination, including against Muslim.
- Moreover, in the 2007 Cordoba Declaration on Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, the Chairperson-in-Office underlined that this specific form of intolerance and discrimination should be regarded with utmost concern and suggested a range of mechanisms and tools to support the efforts of participating States and civil society to counter it.

Reference to the Conference on Countering Intolerance against Muslims in Public Discourse

- However, as underlined at the OSCE High Level Conference on Countering Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims in Public Discourse, which took place on 27-28 October 2011, Vienna, despite of these efforts, anti-Muslim expressions through the media continue to be a matter of concern.
- While acknowledging freedom of religion as a corner stone of democratic societies, the participants pointed out that there is lack of awareness of the impact of anti-Muslim public discourse on the security of both the society, in general and minorities, in particular.
- With the view of countering intolerance against Muslims in public discourse, a number of recommendations, including raising awareness of existence of intolerance against Muslims in society and providing more support for the efforts to counter this phenomenon. I encourage participating states to take into account these recommendations and make sure that they are implemented.

Tolerance Education

- As I highlighted in several occasions, education plays a key role in countering stereotypes against Muslims and promote mutual understanding. That's why I am very pleased that ODIHR's Guidelines for Educators on Countering Intolerance against Muslims were published last year and now they are available in multiple languages, including French, German, Russian and Spanish.
- With the view of promoting these Guidelines, this year ODIHR is organizing roundtable meetings for the representatives of ministries of education, pedagogical institutions and international networks of educational experts. The first roundtable meeting which took place on 6 September in Vienna proofed that there is a lot of interest in this new educational tool. Participants suggested that the Guidelines should be also translated into the official languages of participating States and widely circulated by the ministries of education. They also suggested that ODIHR should develop teaching materials for students on intolerance against Muslims and train teachers on how to counter this phenomenon in schools.
- The second roundtable meeting will take place at UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on 5 November, where there will be an opportunity to discuss how to follow up these recommendations. I strongly encourage educational authorities of participating States attend this important event.

Hate Crimes against Muslims

- As explained in ODIHR's draft hate crime report for the year of 2011, hate crimes do not occur in a vacuum, but can be fuelled by racist, xenophobic and discriminatory public discourse. In fact, even where intolerant speech or hate speech does not result in hate crimes, it can inflame social tensions and induce fear among targeted groups.
- The report provides an example of desecration of a proposed mosque site in Switzerland, where Muslims felt that such an incident took place in an increasingly anti-Muslim atmosphere after referendum on the prohibition of minarets.
- In spite of this, I am concerned that anti-Muslim hate crimes are significantly under-reported and under-recorded. A concrete example

- Participating States should do more to support ODIHR's efforts to increase the reporting about and recording of hate crimes against Muslims. I am pleased to hear that this year ODIHR conducted civil society training activities on this issue for Spain and Bulgaria and there will be another one for Austria in November. However, ODIHR needs more funding to continue its training of NGOs on hate crimes against Muslims.

Freedom of Religion or Belief

- Finally I would like to draw your attention to recent initiatives to curtail certain forms of religious observance common to Muslim and Jewish communities, such as circumcision and ritual slaughter. These initiatives fall into the general pattern of intolerant discourse against the visibility of some religious communities, as in the case of banning wearing of headscarf or construction of minarets.
- That's why, we need to do more on the one side to raise awareness on the freedom of religion or belief and on other side promote a social climate where religious and cultural diversity is appreciated.
- Such efforts will strengthen the foundations of our multiethnic and multicultural societies where every individual is free to maintain his or her identity while participating in social, economic and political life, without any discrimination.

In conclusion

- As the recent tragic events demonstrated, religious bigotry and intolerance have devastating affects not only on the daily lives of the faith communities, but also on the whole society and international relations. To remedy this negative and disturbing phenomenon, we need to develop sound strategies and educational approaches which must be vigorously implemented. International co-operation has to be an important component of these efforts, because we can over come this challenge, only if we work together, with a commitment to protect and promote human rights for everybody.