

**2008 ANNUAL REPORT BY R. AMBASSADOR ÖMÜR ORHUN**  
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**Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims**

**I. Introduction and General Overview**

My mandate as the Personal Representative of the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims was extended for another year by the current CiO of the OSCE, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Finland, at the beginning of 2008. As such, I am now completing my fourth year in this position.

Looking back, I observe with concern that, while promoting tolerance and combating discrimination in general continues to rank high among the agreed and declared priorities of the OSCE, manifestations of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and against people perceived to be Muslim have not subsided in 2008 in many OSCE countries.

Many peoples of the so-called Western world are wrongly led to continue to believe that Muslims are prone to violence and terror and that their traditions and values are not compatible with those of pluralistic societies. It has become politically correct to attack their religion and those with authority and capacity continue to fail to redress such misrepresentation.

As examples of the growing wave of anti-Muslim sentiment and discourse in some European countries, one can cite initiatives to form so-called “inter-city coalitions against Islamization of Europe” and to convene conferences to fight Islam; derogatory remarks by politicians that have been able to make their way to parliaments to the effect that Muslims should be expelled from Europe, that Islam do not belong to Europe, that it is an honour, not an invective to be called fanatical anti Muslim and that there is no place for foreigners with a “different culture” in Europe; proposals for legislation to block construction of mosques and minarets; and suggestions to portray all Muslims as potential criminals inter alia by seeking signatures only from Muslim immigrants that they will not resort to violence.

The continued and at times growing wave of such rhetoric and initiatives can only be characterized as an affront to the human rights and dignity of Muslims living in this part of the world. (The Permanent Council will recall that I had repeatedly underlined my opinion that this is not a matter of religion, but a matter of protecting the human rights and dignity of a specific vulnerable group.)

A further negative consequence of this deplorable situation is the growing uneasiness and feelings of alienation and stigmatization of Muslim immigrants and communities.

Furthermore, this bleak panorama also helps to further widen the fault line between the so-called Western and Muslim worlds.

This year we are commemorating the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In that respect it would also be appropriate to recall the UN motto: “Dignity and Justice for All of Us”. Here, the catch word is “for all of us”, but what is asked is not only dignity, but also justice. This call covers all groups, including of course adherents of all convictions.

As I have already underlined my overall considerations related to the phenomena of intolerance and discrimination against Muslims, as well as my recommendations on countering these negative and disturbing developments in my previous reports in more detail, which remain valid also today, I will confine the rest of my report to an overview of my activities in 2008.

## **II. Overview of Main Activities**

1. In my last report to the Permanent Council (CIO.GAL/161/07/Rev.1) I had mentioned my then forthcoming country visit to Switzerland on 12-14 November 2007. I submitted my report on this country visit to the Finnish Chairmanship in February 2008. However, for reasons that I take exception, this report has not yet been distributed. Naturally I regret this delay.

2. On 10 January 2008 I attended the inaugural Permanent Council meeting under the Finnish Chairmanship. The same day, together with my fellow Personal Representatives I met with the Chairman-in-Office and his collaborators and exchanged views on implementation of our mandates. Later on, we consulted on the same subject with a number of Permanent Representatives and the Chairman of the Permanent Council.

3. On 17-18 January 2008 I conducted a meeting with representatives of Muslim civil society organizations in İstanbul. We reviewed the problems faced by Muslim communities in Europe and dwelled upon measures that can be taken.

4. On 12 February 2008 I had a profitable meeting with the OSCE Secretary General Ambassador Marc Perrin de Brichambaut in Ankara during his official visit to Turkey. We discussed issues related to the implementation of my mandate, the financial and logistical necessities in that respect and the contribution of the OSCE to the UN Alliance of Civilizations initiative.

5. On 19-20 February 2008 I visited the Human Rights Institute of the Bilgi University in İstanbul. I repeated my contacts with this Institute at later occasions. My aim was to initiate the organization of an academic seminar or similar gathering on multiple (aggravated) discrimination. The Chairmanship and the ODIHR were also positively disposed to and supportive of this initiative. However, due to lack of financial resources and support, we could not realize this project in 2008. I hope we will be able to secure funding in 2009.

6. At the end of February I attended the consultation and coordination meeting in Warsaw between the three Personal Representatives, the representatives of the Finnish Chairmanship and the ODIHR. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss areas and modalities of further cooperation among them. The new TANDIS corner for the Personal Representatives became operational shortly after this meeting, based on our discussions. (I welcome this development, which will provide greater access to the general public about the activities and work of the Personal Representatives. In that respect I would like to urge those participating States which have not yet authorized the reports on visits to their countries by the Personal Representatives to be put on TANDIS to expedite their response.) Additionally, the Chairmanship distributed the Modalities for Cooperation between the Personal Representatives and the Finnish Chairmanship (CIO.GAL/58/08), which was finalized under the light of our consultations in Warsaw.

7. In the second half of February, in view of various manifestations of intolerance, discrimination and contempt against Muslims and also in view of growing anti-Muslim sentiment and political discourse in various European countries, I proposed to the Chairmanship that I should issue a press release, mentioning these developments but also calling for tolerance, restraint and mutual respect to all concerned. The Chairmanship, however, was not in concurrence with the text proposed by me and therefore I could not issue a statement.

8. On 4-5 March 2008 I took part at the Council Meeting of the European Council of Religious Leaders held in Berlin. My contribution to this meeting on “Promoting Inter-Cultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue” was made available to the participants.

9. On 18 March 2008 I took part at the Panel organized by the President of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva. The text of my remarks were later distributed under symbol number CIO.GAL/57/08.

10. I continued my contacts with human rights organizations and NGO’s dealing with protecting the rights of Muslim communities in March, in April and also in June.

11. On 21 April 2008 I gave a conference to the members of the Turkish Academy of Sciences in İstanbul on the tolerance programs of the OSCE, on my mandate and activities, and responded to their questions. I was told that this conference was the first occasion where issues related to the OSCE were brought to the attention of this high and prestigious body. (This conference was conducted in Turkish.)

12. On 28-29 April 2008 I attended the meetings of the UN Human Rights Council devoted to Durban Follow-Up. Taking this opportunity I met a number of civil society and government representatives and discussed matters related to the implementation of my mandate.

13. On 16-17 June 2008 I attended the Meeting of National Points of Contact on Hate Crimes organized by the Finnish Chairmanship and the ODIHR in Helsinki. At the Panel

Discussion on Trends and Issues Related to Hate Crimes I gave a short presentation providing an overview of key trends and challenges within my specific area of focus and also providing a brief explanation of my activities. My talking points which had been handed over to the Chairmanship were later distributed as per CIO.GAL/151/08 on 6 October 2008. In the margins of this meeting I also conveyed my views on the draft Annual Hate Crime Report for 2007 to the representatives of the ODIHR, with whom we had a short but profitable exchange of views on matters then currently in our agenda, including future country visits and tolerance and non-discrimination definitions.

14. On 28-29 July 2008 I took part at the ODIHR Expert Meeting on Security, Radicalization and Prevention of Terrorism, organized in cooperation with the Human Rights Institute of the Bilgi University in Istanbul. At the session on “Religious, Ethnic and Racial Profiling” I expanded on my considerations related to this issue in two interventions. Although I provided a copy of my remarks to the Chairmanship immediately after the meeting, they declined to distribute this text, for reasons that I took exception.

Within the margins of this meeting I also undertook consultations with the Director and staff of the Human Rights Institute of the Bilgi University on the proposed academic seminar on multiple (aggravated) discrimination mentioned above. I also compared notes with the ODIHR Adviser on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims on future activities.

15. On 15-17 September 2008 I attended the International Conference “Cooperation with Central Asia” organized by the Evangelische Akademie Loccum (Germany) in cooperation with the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) and made a statement at the Panel on “Cooperation through Inter-Cultural and Inter-Religious Dialogue”. My contribution was distributed as per CIO.GAL/152/08 on 6 October 2008.

16. On 5-7 October 2008 I attended the tolerance sessions of the HDIM and related side events in Warsaw.

On 5 October 2008, I took part at the Civil Society Consultation Meeting between the Personal Representatives of the CiO on Tolerance Issues and representatives of civil society organizations attending the HDIM. At this meeting I provided a short overview on my perceptions related to my mandate and on my activities, and responded to questions and remarks of the civil society representatives. Later the same day I continued my discussions with them at a Working Group devoted exclusively to issues related to intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. I underlined the value I attach to working with the civil society and the need for support to Muslim human rights NGO’s. I said that whereas politics of ideology had dominated the international environment before, now this environment seemed to be dominated by politics of identity, making the contradiction between “us” and “them” more pronounced and rendering protection of the “dignity of the individual” more difficult. Stating that when I had assumed this position four years ago there seemed to exist more conflicts related to Muslims bringing the “Muslim” question to the forefront in the West, whereby everyone was writing

prescriptions without making a sound diagnosis, nowadays a new disturbing trend had emerged, in which people were either urged to forget this problem, or lip-service was paid by organizing cosmetic events for media consumption through receptions where a rosy picture was drawn which did not reflect the reality. I concluded by calling for addressing the root causes and trying to prevent further polarization and division.

On 6 October 2008 at the HDIM Session on Tolerance and Non-Discrimination devoted to the review of implementation of commitments, promotion of mutual respect and understanding and addressing hate crimes, I made a short intervention on topics under discussion. I stressed that I would have wished to state that the dignity of Muslims living in Western countries is being respected; that their human rights are protected; that they are not alienated, stigmatized and pushed to the margins of societies; that they have no structural problems like poor housing, inferior education and lack of equal access to the job market; that they face no hate crimes, no insults, no intolerance and discrimination; that politicians are demonstrating a balanced and fair discourse vis-a-vis Muslims; that the media reporting is unbiased; that there are no coalitions trying to kick Muslims out of Europe or coalitions targeting Muslims; that there are no movements to ban construction of mosques or minarets; and that the OSCE countries without any exception are fulfilling their commitments to combat intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and for that matter against all vulnerable groups. I went on to say that I could not state these things as it would not be true. I concluded by calling for moving from rhetorics to action and implementation of commitments.

On 6 October 2008 I was the introducer at the Roundtable organized as an HDIM side-event by COJEP International on “The Rise of Anti-Immigrant Platforms: Implications for Democracy and Human Rights”. This event proved to be well attended with a lively debate.

17. During 14-18 October 2008 I travelled to the Republic of Kazakhstan.

On 15-16 October I conducted a country visit to Kazakhstan within the scope of my mandate and upon the kind invitation of the Government of Kazakhstan. This was my first visit to a Central Asian participating State. Additionally it was my first visit to a Muslim majority country. I am satisfied with the outcome of my contacts. I would like to express my appreciation to the Kazakh authorities for their frank attitude. The report on this visit has already been submitted to the Chairmanship.

On 17 October, on the other hand, I attended the Conference of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on “The Common World: Progress through Diversity” hosted by Kazakhstan. I moderated the session on “Routes of Islamophobia/Westernophobia and ways of strengthening tolerance and overcoming xenophobia in the mass media. What modern education should be and what would be the role of youth and women in enhancing the equitable dialogue between the West and the Muslim world”. Additionally, I delivered the message of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office Minister Stubb to the Conference.

This Conference proved to be a further example of Kazakhstan's active role in promoting interaction among various cultures.

18. On 21-22 October 2008 I participated at the Copenhagen Conference on "Education for Inter-Cultural Understanding and Dialogue" organized by the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and UNESCO in collaboration with a number of other international organizations including the OIC and the CoE.

19. Immediately afterwards, I conducted a country visit to Sweden on 23-24 October 2008 upon the kind invitation of the Swedish Government. The program of the visit prepared by the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs was comprehensive and well balanced including extensive contacts with the civil society as well as high level meetings with government agencies, including an informative meeting with the Minister of Integration and Gender Equality. At the end of my visit I shared my early reflections with the press, where I said that as compared with continental European countries the situation of Muslims, albeit with problems, seemed better off, although, as even Swedish official representatives had admitted, racial discrimination continued to be an area of concern. I also noted some good practices. The report of my visit will be presented to the Chairmanship in due course.

20. On 28 October 2008 I attended the Third Session of the "OSCE 2008 Mediterranean Seminar on the OSCE Approach to Regional Security – A Model for the Mediterranean". This session was devoted to OSCE's human rights and tolerance commitments and their relevance to the Mediterranean region. After the key note speakers, I acted as one of the discussants making some initial comments on the presentations and raising a few questions aimed at stimulating the subsequent discussion. In that context, I underlined, inter alia, that any dialogue, especially as a conflict prevention tool, must have three basic characteristics to be successful: It must be cognitive, that is to say knowledge about the other is a basic prerequisite; it must be based on moral and ethical responsibility; and it must also be based on political wisdom. One should be conscious of the value of other cultures and beliefs, and cultural stubbornness should be avoided.

21. On 6-7 November 2008 I took part at the International Conference on "Human Rights - Sixty Years after the Universal Declaration: Dignity and Justice for All of Us" hosted by the Maltepe University in İstanbul. I delivered a key-note statement on "Prospects for National and International Politics based on Human Rights", in which, after explaining the human dimension perspectives of the OSCE, I dwelled upon protection and promotion of human rights and dignity within the context of diversity, negative connotations of discrimination, need for true integration through participation, identity and harmony and respect for all. In connection with this conference, I also took part in a live TV debate about the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, whereby I had a chance to explain my OSCE mandate and activities. Both events were conducted in Turkish.

22. On 12-14 November 2008 I participated at the “First Global Forum on Leadership for Shared Societies: Building a World Safe for Difference” organized by the Club de Madrid and the City of Rotterdam in Rotterdam/Holland. The main aim of the forum was to address how political leaders can constructively manage ethnic, cultural, religious and other identity differences, while protecting and preserving human dignity, to build shared societies.

23. Planning till the end of 2008:

On 24-27 November 2008 I will be travelling to Barcelona to attend the Partners Workshop for “Our Shared Europe” project, that is going to be organized by the British Council and Institut Europeu de la Mediterrania.

On 4-5 December 2008 I will be attending the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Helsinki.

On 9-12 December 2008 I will participate at the Commemoration of the 60th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Finally, on 17 December 2008, together with the ODIHR, we will organize the Third Muslim NGO Roundtable here in Vienna. The main focus of the roundtable will be “Youth and Education”. We are planning to invite around 30 civil society representatives. Additionally, representatives of relevant international organizations as well as representatives of Permanent Missions in Vienna will also be invited as observers.

While in Vienna, I will also conduct bilateral consultations with some of the Muslim civil society organizations attending the roundtable.

24. I am pleased and honoured to note that COJEP International, an international NGO operating in 14 European countries in the field of human rights, youth, democracy and anti-discrimination, has informed me that they have decided to give the 2008 COJEP Award on Anti-Discrimination to me.

25. This concludes my 2008 Annual Report. However, taking this opportunity I would like to underline once again the critical need of providing adequate financial and administrative support for the Personal Representatives in order to enable them to satisfactorily perform the duties expected from them. This point has been repeatedly underlined by many during the last couple of years, albeit without any concrete result. For that reason, I would like to stress once more the need for the provision of adequate and sustained resources to them. In that respect, the review undertaken by the Spanish Chairmanship last year (CIO.GAL/192/07) on “The Contribution of the Three Personal Representatives of the CiO to the Overall Effort of the OSCE to Combat Intolerance and Discrimination” contains valuable and pertinent recommendations.

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