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Swedish Presidency of the European Union

Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 5 October 2009

EU Statement, Working Session 10: Tolerance and non-discrimination II (continued)

Mr Moderator,

One of the main functions of the OSCE is to prevent conflict. The Organisation's activity in combating all forms of racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and discrimination is vital to this aim. Whatever their causes, manifestations of intolerance bring about fractures within societies. This undermines their inclusiveness, cohesiveness and capacity to develop.

The OSCE region represents a multicultural, multireligious and multiethnic mix that has the potential to be an example of tolerance for all. We cannot, however, take the fulfilment of this potential for granted. Tolerance and non-discrimination requires constant vigilance and effort. The OSCE, for all its good work, cannot achieve this alone. That is why we welcome the Organisation's mutually-reinforcing co-operation with other European and UN organisations such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance,

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the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

The EU would like to thank the OSCE, ODIHR and the Advisory Panel for their hard work promoting freedom of religion or belief. We welcomed their initiative to hold a follow up to the 2003 event on this important topic in Vienna last July. It was encouraging to see so many participants from OSCE states, NGOs and think tanks. There was certainly a feeling that we were all working towards a shared objective. However, progress has not been sufficient in many states for any of us to feel complacent. At some stages it seemed that the same complaints of 2003 were being presented in 2009. We heard evidence that not all members of the OSCE are complying with commitments on the implementation of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We have all agreed that in the OSCE area we 'recognise and respect the right of the individual to profess and practise, alone and in community with others, religion or belief'. But we continue to hear about people who are not allowed access to their places of worship, those that have to face impossible obstacles for meaningless registrations, arbitrary detentions, destruction of children's teaching materials, confiscation of bibles, people detained for expressing their faith, women receiving threats of rape and many more atrocities.

The EU supports the work of the three Personal Representatives of the Chairman-in-Office in combating intolerance and non-discrimination. The work of the three Personal Representatives has effectively raised awareness of tolerance-related issues at the political level in the OSCE, contributing to tolerance issues being at the forefront in the Human Dimension and other areas. This is of key importance. Governments have a vital role to play in promoting

tolerance and responding robustly to violations of OSCE commitments. We support too the work of ODIHR, the Field Missions and the Offices of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Special Representative of the Freedom of the Media for the work they have done in assisting participating States in fulfilling their OSCE commitments on tolerance and non-discrimination.

Mr Moderator,

Violations to people's freedoms affect our societies as a whole, not just individuals. Questions of tolerance are often linked with other human rights issues. For example violations of freedom of religion encompass infringements to other human rights like freedom of expression, freedom of movement and freedom of association. These are the seeds of conflict that promote confrontations between societies and threaten the stability and the peace of the region. The restrictions to people's rights to manifest their religion or belief are the vehicle for social and political unrest. OSCE participating States have built up a far-reaching set of commitments to counter these threats. But in certain areas, implementation of these commitments has been less than thorough. The EU calls upon all Participating States to adhere fully to their commitments on tolerance, and to continue working with the relevant OSCE institutions and the UN Alliance of Civilizations.

To achieve lasting improvement in matters of xenophobia, intolerance, and sectarian hatred there is no better way than dialogue. It is encouraging, therefore, that more than 80 countries, among them most OSCE member states, have joined the UN

Alliance of Civilizations, whose main mission is to prevent conflicts due to prejudice and cultural or religious misconceptions and build intercultural understanding through media, education and youth exchange.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia, EFTA countries Iceland and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia align themselves with this statement.

* Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.