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Introductory remarks by

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“Strengthening the OSCE in the fight against terrorism: Swiss Chairmanship efforts and priorities”

***Plenary session II of the Twenty-first Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council,
“Fight against Terrorism: Common Challenges within and beyond the OSCE area”***

5 December 2014

Basel

Ministers,
Ladies and gentlemen

Terrorism is one of the major threats of our time: it can hit any of us, anywhere, at any time. It has brought much misery to people in various parts of the world. This year, it has been a particularly virulent problem in the Middle East where we have seen appalling atrocities and serious attacks on the territorial status quo. But terrorism is a global challenge.

Terrorism is a transnational threat that we only can address effectively if we all stand together and join forces. Switzerland is convinced that the OSCE has an important role to play in countering terrorism. This is why we have decided to make this a priority topic of our Chairmanship and also of today's debate.

In recent years, the OSCE has adapted to the growing importance of transnational threats by building up appropriate institutional capacities. The OSCE's comprehensive security approach is a major asset in dealing with these threats. Our organisation can link fighting terrorism to issues such as managing borders and building modern, democratic, and efficient policing conducted in accordance with international legal standards. Furthermore, as a regional organisation of the UN, the OSCE can assist participating States in translating commitments undertaken at the global level into realities on the ground.

The Swiss Chairmanship's goal has been to take the successful work of the OSCE in the field of terrorism further by addressing two issues that are of major concern to participating States and partners for cooperation: *foreign terrorist fighters* and *kidnapping for ransom*.

The Swiss Chairmanship has organised several events to discuss these topics. Let me recall the Counterterrorism Conference in Interlaken last April, with around 200 participants from 43 participating States and 8 partner countries. Another example was a regional workshop on Terrorist Kidnapping and Hostage-Taking for the Mediterranean partners for cooperation that we held in Malta.

Why have we focused on these two issues?

According to recent United Nations figures, there are around 15,000 foreign terrorist fighters from over 80 countries associated with the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and the Al-Nusrah Front for the People of the Levant. Many of these fighters originate from OSCE participating States. There are obvious risks to our societies when such radicalised people return home. This is a threat we can only address collectively.

As for kidnapping for the purpose of securing ransom, this has become one of the primary sources of funding for terrorist groups. Such ransom payments also encourage future kidnappings. Only by refusing to pay ransom can we break this vicious cycle.

The Swiss Chairmanship has proposed two declarations on these issues for adoption by the Ministerial Council. Both documents have been agreed upon in the Preparatory Committee.

The proposed *declaration on foreign terrorist fighters* seeks to enhance cooperation between participating States and to prevent the movement of foreign terrorist fighters through effective border controls and controls on the issuing of travel documents.

The *declaration on kidnapping for ransom* seeks to create a front of States fighting the scourge of kidnapping for ransom, by preventing terrorists from benefitting directly or indirectly from ransom payments or from political concessions, and to secure the safe release of hostage.

Both Ministerial Declarations promote the full implementation of UN Security Council resolutions. By agreeing to these declarations, participating States would reinforce UN-sponsored efforts at countering terrorism, consolidate the OSCE's own role in tackling these issues, and give our organisation a basis for future work.

We encourage the incoming Chairmanship, as well as future Chairmanships, to continue the efforts launched during the Swiss Chairmanship.

Thank you.