

**REPORT BY AMBASSADOR ÖMÜR ORHUN,  
PERSONAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE OSCE  
CHAIRMAN-IN-OFFICE ON COMBATING  
INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION AGAINST  
MUSLIMS,  
ON HIS VISIT TO AND CONTACTS IN FINLAND**

**( 4 – 5 December 2007 )**

**Purpose of the visit:** The primary purpose of the consultation meetings with the Task Force of the incoming Finnish Chairmanship was to exchange views on my mandate, activities and role as the Personal Representative of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims and continuation of my engagement with the incoming CiO during 2008. I also took this opportunity to conduct several meetings with the relevant civil society representatives and governmental authorities to discuss the situation of Muslim minorities in Finland.

The program of my visit was kindly coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland. The program of my visit, together with the Press Release of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Finland, is attached to this report. I was accompanied by Mr. Taşkın Soykan, TND Adviser on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims at the ODIHR.

**Summary of meetings:** In the course of my visit, our discussions concentrated on the following subjects:

- Continuation of the work of the current Personal Representatives under the incoming Finnish Chairmanship;
- The incoming Chairmanship's priority areas in relation to tolerance and non-discrimination;
- Activities envisaged by the CiO Personal Representative and the TND Advisor for 2008;
- Organizational and demographic structure of the Muslim communities in Finland;
- Representation of Muslims in political discourse and media;
- Hate crime legislation and its implementation;
- Education in general and teaching about religions and beliefs in particular;
- Accommodation of religious services for Muslims;
- Discrimination in general against Muslims and the problem of unemployment;
- Inter-faith dialogue.

I will try to summarize our discussions in two parts: 1) exchange of views with the Incoming Chairmanship, and 2) consultations with relevant governmental authorities and civil society representatives.

***Exchange of Views with the Incoming Chairmanship:***

At the meeting with the Head of Incoming Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, Ambassador Härkönen expressed their wish to continue to work with all three Personal Representatives within the same framework which has been in force during the previous Chairmanships. With a view of creating a functional and clear communication line between myself and the incoming Chairmanship, the Head of the Task Force agreed to provide an e.mail list including the names and titles of persons in the Chairmanship to whom I should address my reports and requests. It has also been agreed that, within my mandate as the Personal Representative, I could hire an assistant who would be based in Ankara. In this case, although the Chairmanship could not pay the salary of this person, they could look into possibilities of compensating his or her travel expenses and salary through the OSCE funds.

In addition, Ambassador Härkönen explained that during their Chairmanship they would concentrate on the implementation of the existing OSCE commitments in the area of tolerance and non-discrimination, as well as on activities concerning other human rights issues, such as Roma-Sinti, gender mainstreaming, human trafficking, freedom of expression and assembly, human rights defenders, constitutional justice and human rights and terrorism.

Having briefed about my previous activities performed within my mandate, I specifically stressed my support for the development of Muslim civil society. I mentioned that I was discussing with the ODIHR to jointly organize the second issue-specific ODIHR Muslim-community based NGO Roundtable Meeting in 2008. I also referred to my contributions to several conferences, which were organized by various international NGOs dealing with intolerance and discrimination against Muslims. ODIHR Adviser on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims stated that the ODIHR is planning the launch of the first country specific resource book on Muslims, which is related to Spain, in mid-2008 and it would be appreciated a lot if the Chairmanship and the Personal Representative would be present during this event. Finally, the ODIHR's roundtable with National Point of Contacts on Hate Crimes, which would take place in Helsinki in 2008, was briefly discussed during this meeting.

### ***Consultations with Relevant Governmental Authorities and Civil Society Representatives:***

In all our consultations both with governmental authorities and civil society representatives, there emerged a consensus that although the Finnish society was to a large extent still quite an homogenous society, the number of Muslims in this society was steadily growing as a result of immigration. Although there is no official data on the number of Muslims in Finland, it is estimated that today there are approximately 40,000 ***Muslims living in the country.*** Most of the Muslims hold Finnish citizenships. The Muslims of Finland belonging to different ethnic or national groups and congregations can be classified into two main groups: 1) historical Muslim minority of Finland, namely Tartar Turks, and 2) new immigrant Muslims. Although there is a certain degree of cooperation and coordination between these two different groups, they have organized themselves under separate structures, because their characteristics, level of integration and areas of concern vary a lot from one to the other.

***The Tartar Turks*** are a very small community, which amounts to 800, and they conduct their activities under the Tartar Islamic Community which was established in 1925. Both their representatives and the majority consider them as a fully integrated historical Muslim minority which has also been successful to preserve their language, religion and culture for five generations. While recently they had to close down their school because there were not enough students, they continue their cultural and sportive activities through their own cultural and sport centres. They are proud of mentioning that their cultural centre, which includes a mosque open to all Muslims, provides language and religion courses once a week. They also organize summer camps for the Tartar youth every year. The community has a monthly newspaper in the Tartar language. The Tartars of Finland have access to their own cemetery in accordance with the Islamic tradition. The members of the Tartar minority are well educated and are successful professionals. They contribute a lot to the Finnish society. This also helps them to continue all these activities without any financial support from the government. The Tartar Islamic Community holds meetings with the representatives of Finnish Islamic Council once a year, although it is not a member association. During our discussions with the representatives of the Tartar Islamic Community, we encouraged them to strengthen their cooperation with the Finnish Islamic Council, even to consider becoming a member of it.

It is my firm conclusion that the Finnish Tartar Muslim Community can be considered the best of its kind in Europe, having achieved full integration, while completely preserving their ethnic, linguistic and cultural/religious identity.

The majority of Muslims in Finland, however, consists of newly arrived immigrants from different countries and regions, including Somalia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Northern Africa and the Balkans. The biggest group among these Muslim communities are Somalians and according to the information that we obtained they also constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in Finland, not only because of their religious background but also because of their colour and anti-immigrant sentiments against them.

In 2006 the NGOs representing the interests of the *new Muslim immigrants* established an umbrella organization which is called "the Finnish Islamic Society." As of today, this umbrella organization has 17 member associations, which means that a significant number of Muslim community-based NGOs are already members of the Finnish Islamic Council. During our meeting with the Ombudsperson for Minorities, we were informed that the Ombudsperson for Minorities facilitated the foundation of the Finnish Islamic Council and helped it to receive governmental subsidies. In this regard, it can be said that good cooperation between the Ombudsperson and the Council exists, but the awareness of the Finnish Muslims about this and similar institutions needs to be increased.

In general, the level of education among the Muslim immigrants is quite low and they suffer from high level unemployment, which are signs of lack of integration.

To these two groups of Muslims, a very small Muslim community, namely Finnish converts, can also be added. The Finnish society realized the existence of such a community particularly after the media coverage on their attempt to establish an Islamic Political Party. The community complains that the media ridiculed this initiative and portrayed them as an eccentric group.

In fact, as admitted by the Deputy Speaker of the Parliament, although at the national level *representation about Muslims in political discourse and media* is in general well balanced and respectful, the situation at the local level is far away from being satisfactory. This observation was also shared by the representatives of several NGOs, who also added that most of the hate speech against Muslims occurs in the Internet. Moreover, they pointed out that one of the existing self-regulatory media rules prohibits mentioning the ethnic origins of perpetrators of criminal acts in reporting, but not their religious backgrounds. Therefore, it is still very common to see reports in the media associating Islam with terrorism. They explained that part of the problem is that both politicians and media professional do not have accurate knowledge about Islam and its adherents. Moreover, lack of participation of Muslims in politics and media is also conducive to this situation.

In relation to *hate crime* legislation, our Finnish interlocutors explained that a few years ago Finland modernized its hate crimes law in order to bring it in line with EU standards. The Finnish hate crime legislation sets aggravated punishments for crimes motivated by ethnic, racial and religious hatred. However, crimes motivated by religious hatred are very rarely reported. According to NGO representatives, hate crimes against Muslims are usually registered as racist crimes. They indicated that there is an increase in physical attacks and harassments, as documented in hate crime statistics. At a separate meeting, the Ombudsperson for Minorities also confirmed these observations. While we regretted that the Finnish National Points of Contact on Hate Crimes could not attend our meetings, other governmental authorities were very helpful in explaining the situation concerning the implementation of the hate crime legislation. They also explained that there is a need for training of law enforcement officers on this matter.

During our meeting with the NGOs, we also had the opportunity to discuss the issues concerning *education* in detail. There was a general consensus on the fact that the performance of students with Muslim immigrant background was lower than that of ethnic majority, although this situation may vary a lot from one family to another. They were particularly concerned about special classes for recently arrived immigrants. According to them, once a student is put in such classes, he or she is stuck there for a long time and loses

his or her chance to receive education at the standard level, which is unfortunately the case for many Muslim immigrant children.

Muslim immigrant children also face the problem of receiving **teaching about Islam**. According to the information presented by the representative of the Finnish National Board of Education, the Finnish schools provide facilities for teaching about Islam for Muslim students. For this purpose, the Board, in cooperation with the Finnish Islamic Council, prepares a curriculum, but the problem is that they cannot find qualified teachers willing to teach about Islam. The representatives of the Finnish Islamic Council added that in order to solve this problem, a programme on teaching about Islam was developed at the Helsinki University. However, to date no body has applied to this programme, because the application criteria for the programme is too high. Since there is no general course on teaching about religions and beliefs for all students in Finland, the ODIHR Adviser on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims brought to the attention of the representatives of the Finnish National Board of Education ODIHR's recent publication called "Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools." It was explained that these guidelines were developed by the ODIHR's Advisory Panel of Experts on Freedom of Religion and Belief in order to provide a practical tool kit for the educators who design curriculum for teaching about religions and beliefs in public schools. The Adviser also pointed out the possibility of organizing an ODIHR workshop on this topic in Helsinki if there is an interest. He furthermore encouraged the governmental authorities to nominate an expert from Finland to the Advisory Panel of Experts, because no Finnish expert is yet a member of the panel.

Another issue that the representatives of the Finnish Islamic Council raised was that since Finland recognizes only Lutheran and Orthodox churches as official religions, this creates inequalities in the **accommodation of religious services for Muslims**, which may lead to violation of their freedom of religion. For instance, although the companies established by Muslims are obliged to pay church taxes, only Lutheran and Orthodox churches can benefit from these taxes. Muslim representatives also complained that as the law authorizes only the Lutheran church to administer the cemeteries, Muslims are not allowed to have their own graveyards. According to a new law, the Lutheran church is obliged to establish separate sections in public cemeteries for non-congregational groups, but in practice it is very difficult to bury Muslims in these sections according to the Islamic tradition. They added that lack of appropriate praying places imposes another limitation on performing their religious activities. The only purpose built mosque of Finland is located in Järvenpää and because of the financial difficulties they cannot build another one in Helsinki, although the majority of Muslims live in the capital. Muslim NGO representatives also pointed out that the imams' command of Finnish and knowledge about the Finnish society are very limited, because most of them come from abroad. They emphasized the need for education of imams on the culture, society and history of Finland. In addition, Muslim representatives complained about lack of Islamic slaughterhouses and public health insurance for circumcision operations.

The representatives of civil society and Finnish Islamic Council made the point that Muslim immigrants are very often subject to both direct and indirect **discrimination**. However, as their knowledge about the legal structure of Finland and their rights in this country is very limited, they are usually not aware to whom they can complain when they face discrimination. Ombudsperson for Minorities provides very effective mechanisms in combating discrimination, but as mentioned earlier, this institution needs to work together with the Finnish Islamic Council to raise awareness among the Muslims about these mechanisms. It is particularly difficult for people with darker skin colour, Muslim women with headscarf and applicants with a Muslim name to get a job. Even when they get a job, they can get only low level positions, mostly in the service sector or as bus drivers. This unfortunately leads to ghettoization of Muslim immigrant communities, as is the case for other immigrant groups.

Nonetheless, as stated by the representatives of Muslim communities and other religious groups, there is in general a satisfactory **interfaith dialogue** and peaceful inter-religious

relations in Finland. Although there is no permanent council for interfaith dialogue, the President of Finland convenes a forum of religious representatives every year.

### **Outcome of the visit/meetings:**

Overall, the program for my visit was well rounded. (Only the meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs had to be cancelled because of his illness.)

The meetings with the Finnish OSCE Task Force for the Incoming Chairmanship and other members of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Helsinki helped to identify initial tasks in order to enable the Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims to start working under the new Chairmanship. Both parties agreed to continue to cooperate within the same framework which has been in force during the previous Chairmanships.

Moreover, the consultation meetings with the government officials and civil society representatives served to have a better understanding of the organizational and demographic structure of the Muslim communities in Finland and their problems and expectations. We have observed that to date there has been no major incident which might have considerably damaged the trust between the Muslims and the majority. As it was also pointed out by the Chairman of the Finnish Islamic Council, it is very important that the Finnish society should use the opportunity to build a robust relationship with its new Muslim minorities at the very beginning, while they are still relatively small. In this regard, besides improving its integration policies and programmes, the Finnish government could make some gestures, because symbolic acts play a very important role in this area, in order to demonstrate that Muslims with their culture are an integral part of the Finnish society. For instance, as suggested by the Head of Engagement with the Islamic World Project within the MFA, the government can invite the religious leaders of Muslims to the celebration of the national day. Additionally, the expectations of the Muslim communities related to, for example, Muslim burial facilities, proper praying places and financial support should be met to enable them to feel equal members of the Finnish society. Finally, structural problems, including those related to education and employment of Muslims deserve more attention.

### **Recommendations to the Chairman-in-Office:**

Although my visit to and contacts in Helsinki was not aimed to constitute a country visit, I would nevertheless recommend that this brief report be made available to relevant governmental agencies and civil society representatives in Finland, to participating States of the OSCE, to its Partners for Cooperation, to other OSCE institutions and mechanisms and to other relevant international organizations.

I would also like to recommend that the suggestions contained in this report to improve the situation of Muslims in Finland and to meet their legitimate expectations be noted and addressed by the Finnish Government.

## **Visit of Ambassador Ömür Orhun, OSCE Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, to Helsinki**

**3 - 6 December 2007**

Amb. Orhun is accompanied by the Adviser on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims at OSCE/ODIHR, Mr. Taskin Soykan

### **Monday 3 December**

- 19:55           Arrival of Mr. Taskin Soykan to Helsinki.
- 22:30           Arrival of Amb. Ömür Orhun to Helsinki.  
Amb. Orhun will be met at the airport by Ms. Ann-Mari Fröberg of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force

### **Tuesday 4 December**

- 10:30-11:00   Meeting with Mr. Johannes Koskinen, Member of Parliament, Second Deputy Speaker, Vice-Chair of Delegation of Finland to the OSCE-PA  
Venue: "Diplomat room", Parliament of Finland
- 11:45- 12:45   Meeting with Ambassador Aleksii Härkönen, Head of Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force.  
Venue: Fireplace Cabinet, Ministry for Foreign Affairs
- 13:00-14:30   Luncheon hosted by Ambassador Aleksii Härkönen.  
Venue: Linnakabinetti (Castle Cabinet), Ministry for Foreign Affairs  
List of participants attached.
- 15:00-16:00   Meeting with officials and NGO's working with tolerance-related issues.  
Venue: meeting room Karhu, Ministry for Foreign Affairs  
List of participants attached.
- 19:00           Dinner hosted by Ambassador of Turkey H.E. Mr. Reha Keskinetepe.  
Paasikivenkatu 2, Helsinki

### **Wednesday 5 December**

- 9:30-11:00    Meeting with representatives of the Finnish Tatar Islamic Community and Finnish Islamic Council  
Venue: meeting room Karhu, Merikasarmi  
  
List of participants attached

- 11:15-11.45 Meeting with Under-Secretary of State (Foreign and Security Policy, Communications and Culture) Mr. Markus Lyra  
Venue: meeting room Karhu, Merikasarmi,
- 12:00-12:30 Meeting with Ms. Johanna Suurpää, Ombudsman for Minorities  
Venue: Office of the Ombudsman, Mikonkatu 4, 5th floor
- 13:00-14:30 Luncheon hosted by Ms. Kirsti Westphalen, Counsellor, Head of Engagement with the Islamic World project, MFA  
Venue: Restaurant Nokka, Kanavaranta 7  
(Amb. Ömür Orhun, Mr. Taskin Soykan, Ms. Ann-Mari Fröberg)
- 15:00 Visit to the Finnish Tatar Islamic Community  
Venue: Fredrikinkatu 33A, Helsinki

**Thursday 6 December**

- 09:30 Departure of Mr. Soykan to Warsaw.
- 16:00 Departure of Amb. Orhun to Munich.

**Contact persons at MFA:**

Ms. Ann-Mari Fröberg, Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force: Mobile +358 400 183 421, tel. +358 9 160 55493

Ms. Sanna Mertimo, Secretary, Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force: Mobile +358 40 839 7278, tel. +358 9 160 55088

**Visit of Ambassador Ömür Orhun, OSCE CiO's Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, to Helsinki**

**Luncheon 4 December 2007 hosted by Ambassador Aleksi Härkönen, Head of the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force**

1. Ambassador Ömür Orhun, OSCE Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims
2. Mr. Okan Daher, Chairman, Finnish Tatar Islamic Community
3. Mr. Ahmadane Mohammed, President, Finnish Council of Islam
4. Mr. Risto Cantell, Executive Director (Rev.Dr), Department for International Relations, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland
5. Ms. Sanna Ylä-Jussila, Reverend (Project Secretary for Ecumenical Week of International Responsibility), Finnish Ecumenical Council
6. Mr. Dan Kantor, Ombudsman, Jewish Congregation of Helsinki
7. Mr. Taskin Soykan, Adviser on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, OSCE/ODIHR
8. Ms. Ann-Mari Fröberg, Second Secretary, Finnish OSCE Chairmanship Task Force, MFA
9. HOST



**Visit of Ambassador Ömür Orhun, OSCE CiO's Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, to Helsinki**

**Meeting with representatives of the Islamic Community in Finland,  
5 December 2007.**

**9:30-11:00 hrs**

**Venue: Meeting room Karhu, Ministry for Foreign Affairs,**

1. Mr. Anas Hajjar, Chair of the Board, Islamic Council of Finland
2. Mr. Okan Daher, President, Finnish Tatar Islamic Community
3. Ms. Pia Jardi, Secretary, Islamic Council of Finland
4. Ms. Paula Bahmanpour, Information Officer, Islamic Council of Finland
5. Mr. Feysal Samarhan, Finnish Tatar Islamic Community

**Visit of Ambassador Ömür Orhun, OSCE CiO's Personal Representative on Combating Intolerance and Discrimination against Muslims, to Helsinki**

**Meeting with officials and NGO's dealing with issues related to tolerance, 4 December 2007, 15:00-16:00 hrs**

**Venue: Meeting room Karhu, Ministry for Foreign Affairs,**

1. Mr. Pekka Iivonen, Counsellor of Education, The Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE)
2. Ms. Marisel Soto Godoy, Project Coordinator/ Immigrants and Work for Multiculturalism, Finnish Red Cross
3. Mr. Yeteshawork Berhanu, Immigrants and Work for Multiculturalism, Finnish Red Cross

Regrets:

4. Ms. Sinikka Keskinen, Senior Adviser, National Contact Point on Hate Crimes, Ministry of Labour
5. Mr. Jorma Laitinen, Detective Inspector, National Contact Point on Hate Crimes, Ministry of the Interior
6. Ms. Milla Aaltonen, Project Coordinator, Finnish League for Human Rights

Press Releases, 12/3/2007

## **Discrimination against Muslims on the agenda during the visit of OSCE representative for combating non-tolerance Ömür Orhun**

Press release 268/2007

3 December 2007

Ambassador Ömür Orhun, OSCE Chairman-in-Office's Personal Representative on Combating Violence and Discrimination against Muslims, will visit Finland on 4-5 December. During his visit, Ambassador Orhun will meet Foreign Minister Ilkka Kanerva as well as representatives of the Muslim community and other religious communities in Finland. Ambassador Orhun's itinerary will also include meetings with Second Deputy Speaker of the Parliament Johannes Koskinen and Ombudsman for Minorities Johanna Suurpää.

During the visit, the purpose is to discuss, for instance, action for promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination during the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship in 2008.

The representative on combating violence and discrimination against Muslims is tasked with bringing publicity to the operations of the OSCE and – in co-operation with OSCE human rights institutions – support the OSCE member states in execution of obligations concerning the principle of tolerance and non-discrimination.

In recent years, the OSCE has also made wide-ranging investments in promotion of tolerance at the practical level. In the Ministerial Council of Madrid on 29-30 November, the organisation published guidelines for teaching about religion-related matters in public schools – "Toledo Guiding Principles on Teaching about Religions and Beliefs in Public Schools" – drafted by a team of experts from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, ODIHR. According to a hate crime report concerning the OSCE area, published this autumn, the number of hate crimes against people publicly practicing their religion has increased in the OSCE area. Most of the victims of hate crimes with religion as motivation are Muslims and Jews.

Turkish Ömür Orhun was appointed Chairman-in-Office's Personal Representative on Combating Violence and Discrimination against Muslims in 2004.