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**STATEMENT BY THE DELEGATION OF THE  
RUSSIAN FEDERATION AT THE OSCE CHAIRMANSHIP  
CONFERENCE ON INTOLERANCE AND DISCRIMINATION  
AGAINST MUSLIMS**

Cordoba, 9 and 10 October 2007

The Russian delegation would like, first of all, to thank Spain in general and Mr. Miguel Ángel Moratinos, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Spain and OSCE Chairman-in-Office, personally for having organized this very important event in Cordoba.

It is no accident that it was Spain's idea to hold this conference — since the earliest times representatives of different religions and cultures have given an example of harmonious coexistence in Spain and in 2004, together with Turkey, the country put forward an initiative to establish an Alliance of Civilizations. The fact that the first Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations is to take place in Madrid is evidence of the high regard the international community has for activities aimed at developing mutual understanding and tolerance.

There is much to be said about the reasons behind such a dangerous and worrying phenomenon as Islamophobia, a phenomenon that has spread throughout the OSCE area. It is clear that following terrorist acts in many countries, with which we are all sadly familiar, there is an exaggerated identification of the ideology of fanatics and terrorists with Islam as a world religion. The media have played no small role in this, not always covering these events appropriately and from time to time using such turns of phrase as “Islamic terrorists” or “the Islamic threat”. As a result of this, many people have developed a distorted view of Islam. There is also a similar tendency in the reverse direction — in the East everything connected with Western values is beginning to be interpreted as something negative. As a result, there are manifestations of radicalism on both sides — on the one hand, the reaction on the streets of Muslim countries to the cartoon scandal; on the other, the march in Brussels last month under the banner “Stop the Islamification of Europe”.

In recent years, Russia too has been the victim of terrorist acts resulting in the loss of many lives. Within the framework of the United Nations, the Group of Eight (G8), the OSCE, the Council of Europe and other international organizations, our country has played an active role in the development and implementation of measures to counter extremism and continues to do so. In that context, we should like to say a few words about one important way of countering this evil — the policy of refusing to give it publicity. Those who promote or are actively involved in extremism should not be allowed to appear on our television screens or draw attention to themselves in the press, and still less at any international forums. The Russian Federation has repeatedly insisted and will continue to insist that persons and organizations of this kind who disguise themselves as human rights activists should not be involved in the work of the OSCE.

It is also important that in the Russian Federation, which serves as a unique example of peaceful coexistence among followers of different religions (more than 22,000 religious organizations representing 60 different denominations operate in our country), everything is being done to prevent intolerance and discrimination on the basis of a person's culture or religion.

This also applies in full measure to the 20 million people with Muslim roots who live in our country. The last decade can well be described as of a time of rebirth of their spiritual life. More than 3,500 Muslim religious organizations are operating in our country, and there are more than 6,000 mosques and more than 100 madrasas and other religious educational institutions. A range of measures are being taken to establish a continuous multi-level system for the training of highly qualified specialists in Islamic history and culture.

Leaders of Russian Muslim organizations are represented in the Interreligious Council of Russia, the Council for Co-operation with Religious Associations under the Office of the President of the Russian Federation and the Commission for Religious Associations under the Auspices of the Government of the Russian Federation. No important government decisions on religious affairs are taken without the agreement of religious leaders.

Measures continue to be taken to move Russia's relations with the Islamic world to a qualitatively new level. As you are aware, Russia was accorded observer status in the Organization of the Islamic Conference in 2005 and in ISESCO (the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) — the Islamic equivalent of UNESCO — in 2007. A centre for Arab and Islamic studies has been set up and a fund to support Islamic culture, science and education has begun its work. In addition to political, scientific and cultural activities, we believe that co-operation with the Islamic world should also be strengthened in the economic sphere.

Russia initiated the establishment of a number of bodies in the area of dialogue among religions and civilizations, including the "Russia-Islamic World" strategic vision group and the "Dialogue among Civilizations" world social forum, and last year alone it organized such important international events as the World Summit of Religious Leaders in Moscow, the seminar on "Dialogue, tolerance and education: the concerted action of the Council of Europe and the religious communities" in Kazan, and the conference entitled "Dialogue of Cultures and Interreligious Co-operation" in Nizhniy Novgorod.

We believe that Russia's religious diversity and its rich experience in the tolerant coexistence of different ethnic groups and religions provides an example on the basis of which possible guidelines and approaches for dealing with the problems facing European countries in countering Islamophobia can be developed.

Much remains to be done within the OSCE if we are to prevent the world splitting along a religious divide. The danger of such a development is becoming increasingly evident and it is one of the most dangerous challenges of the twenty-first century. Only if they pool their efforts will countries be able to find an appropriate response to this challenge. Russia is prepared to play an active role in this process.

Thank you for your attention.