

DELEGATION OF TURKEY

ENGLISH only

**OSCE CONFERENCE
ON RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION**

(Vienna, 4-5 September 2003)

Concluding Remarks

Non-discrimination, Dialogue and Harmony

The OSCE Ministerial Council at its annual meeting last December condemned discrimination on religious grounds and undertook to endeavour to prevent and protect against attacks directed at any religious group, whether on persons or on places of worship or religious objects. The Ministerial Council also condemned the recent increase in acts of discrimination and violence against Muslims and firmly rejected the identification of terrorism and extremism with a particular religion or culture, recognizing the responsibility of states for promoting tolerance and non-discrimination.

Let us try to analyze the factors that led the Ministers to take these decisions.

It is evident that not only a general, but also a basic understanding among different cultures, religions and civilizations is very vulnerable today.

The post-September 11 events attest to this phenomenon. These events regrettably led to reactions to identify terrorism, and for that matter anything evil on cultural and especially religious lines.

Additionally, we also observe an unfortunate trend towards a conceptual definition of "the other" and a tendency to create a scape goat.

"The other" is defined as someone who violates "our values" by resorting to force, to terrorism, to injustice and to negation of universal human rights. "The other" is openly or indirectly referred to generally as Islam or at the least as the "East".

We can try to define religion as a divinely inspired system of belief, values and ethical norms. As such, all established (Abrahamic) religions preach ethical behaviour. Islam is no exception. Therefore, the notion that Islam is the root cause of some evil is, to say the least, unfair and wrong.

What is needed in our age is mutual knowledge and understanding, dialogue and cooperation; this will lead to harmony, peace and prosperity. The way to achieve this noble goal is to ascertain the probable medium and long-term problems and to seek solutions for them. We also need patience.

Dialogue, on the other hand, is only possible through communication. Culture of cooperation must replace culture of conflict. It should also be recognized that political dialogue would be more meaningful in an environment where there is social and economic balance and equity.

We have to admit that today there are political and cultural fault lines. Like in an earthquake, if the fault lines move suddenly the devastating effects would be impossible to contain. Therefore, we must try to reconcile these fault lines. If we wish present conflicts be resolved and potential problems be prevented, we must aim to reach at a concept of “us” instead of “the other”.

Tolerance and non-discrimination is a matter of mentality. The very root cause of intolerance is ignorance and intolerance is the source for racism, xenophobia and discrimination. Combat against these phenomena and related intolerance is a continuous long term process, in which the international community, Governments, civil society and the media share responsibility. This process requires systematic efforts based on human values and knowledge of and respect for one another.

My conclusion is that, what we need is a positive consciousness on the necessity of a new relationship among cultures to attain solidarity through respect for cultural diversity. We must collectively have the wisdom, and not only wisdom but also courage, for working and living together; thereby eliminate any clash among cultures or civilizations.

Finally, let me underline our conviction on the necessity of follow-up of this conference and of its recommendations.

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General Recommendations

- Participating States should undertake all efforts to reach at a concept of “us” instead of “the other”. It should be recognized that dialogue, communication, culture of cooperation and solidarity would be conducive in combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination.
- Participating States should strive, within all means at their disposal, to refrain from identifying any form of criminality, including terrorism and anything evil on cultural, ethnical and especially religious lines. Within this scope, they should condemn and counter tendencies and practices of Islam-phobia and help create an environment of tolerance and understanding, respecting international norms of human rights.
- The OSCE community should continue its efforts to combat racism, xenophobia and discrimination, also through convening similar events (conferences) in the future and be seized with this matter continuously.