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STATEMENT BY PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF TURKEY,
AMBASSADOR TACAN İLDEM
IN RESPONSE TO THE ADDRESS BY H.E. PROF. İHSANOĞLU
THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE OIC
(933TH PC, 29 November 2012)

Mr. Chairperson,

I would like to join the previous speakers in warmly welcoming H.E. Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, Secretary General of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to the Permanent Council. I thank him for the comprehensive presentation that he shared with us today on the perspective of the OIC on a broad range of issues of common concern for both organizations.

We believe that cooperation between the two organizations would be complementary and mutually reinforcing in dealing with the security challenges of our time. Improving contact and practical cooperation based on the 1999 Platform for Cooperation Security would not only serve the spirit of the OSCE that all participating States are guided by, but also provide a unique forum of dialogue, an instrument that the OSCE is meant for.

Mr. Chairperson,

We appreciate that Prof. İhsanoğlu has devoted a significant portion of his address to the issue of intolerance and discrimination based on religious beliefs and faith. Let me stress here that we share the views of the Secretary-General on these issues, including the need for cooperation between the OIC and the OSCE in tackling the challenges that they pose. We agree that both organizations are well-situated to share their best practices and discuss ways to enhance strategies as regards religious intolerance.

As my esteemed colleagues will recall, I have reiterated on many occasions that racism, xenophobia and discrimination based on religion, particularly in its manifestation of Islamophobia, continues to be a matter of grave concern in the OSCE area. We are pleased to note that this assessment is also shared by the Secretary General, who has highlighted the unfortunate prevalence of Islamophobia in Western societies. As I pointed out during my reply to Ambassador Lenarcic's presentation earlier this month, the testimony of a large number of civil society organizations during the relevant sessions of this year's Human Dimension Implementation Meeting amply demonstrates just how serious the situation on the ground has become.

In this context I would like to stress once again that the OSCE in general and ODIHR in particular need to do more in order to address this issue. It is high time that we go beyond the messages of solidarity and mutual understanding. Resolute action and more importantly effective dialogue and cooperation are more than necessary. For this reason, we welcome the recent meeting in OIC Headquarters between Secretaries General of OSCE and OIC, and we call for an even increased interaction and consultations between the two organizations. We believe that the aspiration and the efforts of both organizations to attain greater security for

our citizens are complementary. Working in concert with the OIC, as suggested by the Secretary General, could help OSCE to gain valuable insights on how to formulate an appropriate and effective response to the existing challenges.

Mr. Chairperson,

In taking up the issue of anti-Muslim sentiment, Prof. İhsanoğlu also aptly addressed instances of irresponsible media representation as regards Islam and Muslims. We agree with the Secretary-General that such cases raise concerns with regard to the misuse of freedom of expression. We have emphasized numerous times that not only the opportunities, but also the challenges and responsibilities associated with the freedom of expression must be taken into account and properly addressed. Allow me to quote from Minister Davutoğlu's remarks in Djibuti on 15 November at the 39th Session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers: "We have to find a balance between protecting the rights of an individual or group to free expression and protecting the right of another individual or group not to become the target of hatred, emotional, incited or psychological violence."

In this context I would also like to recognize the importance of the joint statement that the Secretary General has referred to, on peace and tolerance issued on 21 September this year by the Secretaries General of the OIC and the Arab League, the Africa Union Commissioner for Peace and Security and EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, in which they stressed the anguish of Muslims at the production of the film insulting Islam and condemned any act of incitement to hatred and intolerance, as well as the violent demonstrations that resulted in unfortunate loss of lives. We believe that the content and timeliness of that statement was commendable. That no reference was made to it in today's statement on behalf of the EU must probably be due to the brevity of the intervention.

Mr. Chairperson,

Turkey, as member of both Organizations, will continue to lend its support to every effort to achieve mutual respect and understanding throughout the vast geography covered by the OIC and the OSCE.

In conclusion, we would like to wish the distinguished Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation every success in his future endeavors.

Thank you, Mr. Chairperson.